



## Baobab Women's Project C.I.C. Child Safeguarding Policy

### 1. Policy statement - Children

Baobab comes into contact with children through its advocacy and advice activities. Children attending our activities are always accompanied by an adult, as our services are for women over the age of 18.

Baobab recognises that we have a responsibility to:

- Safeguard and promote the interests and well being of children with whom we are working, including the children of adults who use our services
- Take all reasonable practical steps to protect children from harm, discrimination or degrading treatment,
- Recruit safely, ensuring all necessary checks are made,
- Respect children's rights, wishes and feelings,
- Work with the local safeguarding children boards.

This policy applies to all staff and volunteers of Baobab who have contact with children at activities and, indirectly, through its events, training or research. Directors will have no contact with children while carrying out their duties but they must be aware of the policy and are responsible for its implementation.

Baobab staff members and volunteers who come into contact with children will be made aware of this policy and how it is applied during their induction process. Relevant staff members will receive child protection training when required for their job.

Children and parents that Baobab comes into contact with will be informed of this policy and the procedures contained in it as appropriate.

All suspicions and allegations of abuse will be taken seriously and responded to swiftly and appropriately in accordance with this policy.

Staff members will report any incidents of child safeguarding to the Director, who will report quarterly to the Management Committee. Volunteers will report to the Volunteer Coordinator who will alert the Director. The Directors will consider each incident, to protect the confidentiality of individuals under concern, and share relevant aspects with the management committee to establish whether any changes to Baobab's practice need to be made in the future.

### 2. Definitions of Child Abuse

This policy has been drawn up on the basis of legislation, policy and guidance that seeks to protect children in England. A summary of the key legislation and guidance is available from [nspcc.org.uk/childprotection](http://nspcc.org.uk/childprotection).

For the purposes of this policy and in line with child protection legislation, the term 'child' refers to anyone under the age of 18 years. Baobab adopts the definition of child abuse/child cruelty from NSPCC guidance: *Child abuse is behaviour that causes actual or likely significant harm to a child. There are four types of child cruelty and an abused child may experience more than one type of cruelty:*

- Physical abuse: including hurting or injuring a child, inflicting pain, poisoning, drowning or smothering.

- Sexual abuse: including direct or indirect sexual violence and exploitation, or corruption of children by involving them in inappropriate activities [of a sexual nature]. This includes incest and all forms of sexual activity involving children under the age of 16, including pornography.
- Emotional abuse: repeatedly rejecting children, humiliating them or denying their worth and rights as human beings.
- Neglect: the persistent lack of appropriate care of children, including love, stimulation, safety, nourishment, warmth, educational and medical attention.

We also recognise that migrant children face other forms of abuse, including female genital mutilation (FGM) which covers 'all procedures that involve partial or total removal of the external female genitalia or other injury to the female genital organs for non- medical reasons'. It is also known as female circumcision, 'cutting' or 'being cut'.

UK law protects women and girls resident in the UK from FGM whether it takes place in the UK or they are taken overseas for the purpose of FGM. The Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) Act 2003 means that:

- It is illegal to circumcise a woman or child on cultural / non-medical grounds
- It is an offence to take a UK national or resident overseas for the purpose of, to aid and abet, procure, or carry out FGM.
- FGM carries a maximum penalty of 14 years in prison (more than 200 cases have been investigated in the last five years with the first prosecution in 2014 but thus far, there have been no convictions).

### **3. Recognising Abuse:**

Child abuse occurs to children of both sexes and all ages, in all cultures, religions, and social classes and to children with and without disabilities. All staff and volunteers should be alert to signs that a child may be at risk of significant harm. Some general considerations are as follows:

- Identification of child abuse may be difficult.
- Different types of child abuse may be present at the same time, e.g. a child who is being sexually abused may also be being physically abused.
- Always listen carefully to the child – pay particular attention to any spontaneous statement. In the case of children without speech or with limited language, pay attention to their signing or other means of expression, including behaviour and play.
- Any delay in seeking medical assistance or indeed none being sought at all, could be an indicator of abuse.
- Beware if explanation of an accident is vague, lacking detail, is inconsistent with the injury, or varies with each telling.
- Take note of inappropriate responses from parents or carers.
- Observe the child's interaction with the parents – particularly wariness, fear or watchfulness.
- Any history or patterns of unexplained injury/illness requires the most careful scrutiny. The fact that the parent/carer appears to be highly attentive and concerned should not divert attention from the assessment of risk.
- Beware if the child's injury is inconsistent with the child's development and mobility.
- Beware if there are indications of or a history of domestic violence. Violence towards adults may also indicate violence towards children and itself be experienced as emotionally abusive.
- Children who are being abused often do not say and tend to perceive themselves as deserving of ill treatment. This is particularly so for children who are being emotionally abused.
- The trafficking of children is likely to involve any or all of these types of abuse.

- It may be abusive for a child to witness domestic violence even if they are not a victim themselves.

#### **4. Child Protection Procedures**

Baobab recognises that any procedure is only as effective as the ability and skill of those who operate it.

Our staff and volunteers will work with parents/carers to ensure that the needs and welfare of children remain paramount. We can reduce situations of the abuse of children and help protect staff and volunteers by promoting good practice.

It is recognised that our staff and volunteers are not experts in the field of child abuse and our duty is to report suspected cases of abuse **not** to investigate cases. The Social Services department has a statutory duty under the Children Act 1989 to investigate such cases.

Client confidentiality will be maintained at all times in accordance with Baobab's Confidentiality Policy. If a breach of confidentiality is deemed necessary, it will be carried out strictly in accordance with the procedures set out in that policy and below.

#### **5. Code of conduct for staff, volunteers and trustees**

##### **Staff and volunteers should always:**

- Be aware of situations which may present risks and manage them.
- Plan and organise their work and the workplace to minimise risks.
- Be visible in their contact with children – be in an open area, when working with children.
- Encourage children and adults to raise any concerns about inappropriate behaviour with, or abuse of children.
- Challenge poor practice or potentially abusive behaviour in others.
- Empower children – discuss with them their rights, what is acceptable and unacceptable and what they can do if there is a problem.

##### **Staff and volunteers must never:**

- Allow themselves to be left alone with a child.
- Be in a situation with a child where they are completely unobserved.
- Take children to their home under any circumstances.
- Use language, make suggestions or offer advice which is inappropriate, offensive or abusive.
- Behave physically in a way that is inappropriate for example playing games with children involving tickling and wrestling which could be misconstrued.
- Do things for children of a personal nature that they can do for themselves eg going to the toilet or getting dressed.
- Hit or otherwise physically assault or abuse children
- Develop physical or sexual relationships with children, or relationships which could in any way be deemed exploitative or abusive.
- Act in ways intended to shame, belittle, humiliate or degrade children.
- Discriminate against, show differential treatment, or favour particular children to the exclusion of others.

#### **6. Responding to suspicious or allegations of child abuse.**

Baobab staff and volunteers will remain alert to potential signs of abuse and if they are concerned that a child is being abused, they will:

- Allow the child to speak freely and at his/her own pace;
- Record all relevant factual details immediately in the attached form;
- Reassure the child that she/he was right to tell someone about the abuse;
- Communicate with the child in a way that is appropriate to their age, understanding and preference. This is especially important for those whose first language is not English;
- Consider the welfare of other children for example siblings, who might also be at risk.

Staff and Volunteers will not:

- Panic – this will silence the child;
- Ask for specific details of the abuse;
- Promise confidentiality;
- Fail to report their concerns.

Staff and volunteers will bear in mind that an allegation of child abuse or neglect may lead to a criminal investigation, so they will not do anything that may jeopardise a police investigation, such as asking a child leading questions or attempting to investigate the allegations of abuse.

There is always a commitment to work in partnership with parents or carers where there are concerns about their children. Therefore in most situations it would be important to talk to parents or carers to help clarify any initial concerns.

However where a parent or carer may be responsible for the abuse, the suspicion, allegation or incident should be reported to the the Director on the same day and **recorded on the attached form**. It is the responsibility of the Director to agree a course of action including informing the Social Services Child Protection Unit if deemed appropriate, with consent of another Director where this breaches confidentiality. However, a referral should not be delayed if a child is at immediate risk, even if the other Directors are not contactable.

The decision and reasons not to seek parental consent before making a referral to Social Services must be recorded. Where a parent has agreed to the referral, this must be recorded and confirmed in the referral to Social Services.

If Baobab become aware of a 'child in need' where there is no reason to believe any abuse and the parents are doing everything they can to provide for the child but the parents' destitution impacts on the child's welfare then Baobab will make referral to Children's Social Services to support the family together, as appropriate.

## 7. Recruitment

Every effort will be made to ensure that trustees, staff and volunteers recruited to work for Baobab are suitable to do so. For example:

- The Director and Management Committee will assess every post to be recruited, to determine whether it requires a DBS check or disclosure of criminal convictions due to the post's work with children or vulnerable adults.
- If so, this will be made clear in the recruitment literature.
- During the selection process, if relevant to the post, the recruitment panel will ask the candidate questions about good practice when working with children, and how to minimise risks of child abuse or inappropriate behaviour.
- Any offer to a successful candidate will be subject to satisfactory checks. This includes reference checks and where necessary a satisfactory DBS check and disclosure form of previous criminal convictions.

- Baobab's standard reference request form includes the specific question: '*This post may require the candidate to work with children, young people or vulnerable adults. Do you know of any reason why this person should not work with these client groups?*'
- The candidate will not be confirmed in post, or work with children, before satisfactory references, and where necessary DBS checks and disclosure forms have been received.
- Agency staff in relevant posts must have a relevant DBS check. The Director must have written confirmation of this from the agency supplying staff, before the individual begins work with children or vulnerable adults.

### **Convictions that will cause concern**

Baobab is committed to the principle of equality of opportunity, and subject to the overriding consideration of protecting children and vulnerable adults, all efforts will be made to prevent unfair discrimination against those with criminal records.

Only those convictions that may make a staff member unsuitable to work with children or vulnerable adults will cause concern. Examples of offences that are likely to cause concern are:

- Those of a sexual nature
- Attack or abuse against a person
- Sexual/ racial/ homophobic abuse
- Offences against a minor

This list is not exhaustive or conclusive.

If, following checks, there are any convictions that cause concern, the Directors will take a decision about whether to:

- Retract Baobab's offer of employment or end employment
- State additional conditions of employment
- Continue with its offer of employment

Written reasons will be given for refusal of employment or any conditions imposed.

If a staff member or volunteer commits an offence, is cautioned or acquires a criminal conviction whilst employed by Baobab they must inform the Director who must inform the other Directors. Baobab will assess the risk that this brings to the people they are working with. It will not prove automatic grounds for dismissal but it may do if the offence is one which damages trust, calls into question their suitability for the work they do or is likely to damage the reputation of Baobab. Baobab has a legal obligation to refer any information that we may have regarding individuals who pose a threat to children or vulnerable adults to the ISA (Employees and Volunteers). This may lead to the individual being identified and barred from working with these groups.

## **8. Allegations of abuse against members of staff and volunteers**

Child abuse can and does occur outside the family setting. It is crucial that those involved at Baobab are aware of this possibility and that all allegations are taken seriously and the appropriate action is taken.

Baobab is fully committed to support and protect anyone who, in good faith, reports his or her concerns that a colleague is or may be abusing a child.

The Baobab Directors have a responsibility to ensure proper supervision of people working with children in all Baobab services.

Allegations of unacceptable and/or abusive behaviour towards children may come to light via the Baobab's complaints procedure (see Baobab Complaints Procedure) or may be raised verbally. Any allegations of unacceptable and/or abusive behaviour, however they are raised, must be acted on immediately.

**Process when a complaint is made against a member of staff**

- Record the complaint on the attached form
- Report the complaint to the Director (or Board of Directors if the complaint is against the Director)
- The Director and the board of Directors will decide whether the statutory authorities need to be involved (or the board of Directors, if the complaint is against the Director).
- If the statutory authorities do need to be involved, the Director (or Board of Directors) will make the referral. An internal Baobab enquiry will be suspended until the investigation is completed.
- Baobab has the right to suspend staff members during or following investigations.
- After any investigation by statutory authorities has been concluded, or if it is not necessary to make a referral to statutory authorities, the Director and board of Directors will consider whether to undertake an internal enquiry to decide appropriate internal action (for example disciplinary or misconduct action/ investigation, discussion with the steering group).
- Every effort will be made to ensure confidentiality for all concerned, within the parameters of the above procedure.

**What happens following a complaint of abuse against a member of staff?**

Where there is a complaint of abuse against a member of staff there may be three types of investigation.

1. A criminal investigation
2. A child protection investigation
3. A disciplinary or misconduct investigation

Results of the police and social services investigation may influence the disciplinary investigation. Issues of misconduct will be dealt with by a committee comprising of the Directors of Baobab, and two members of the Management Committee.

## 9. Reporting form for suspected or alleged abuse

**This form is to be used by Baobab staff members or volunteers, to report any incident involving actual or suspected abuse of a child or vulnerable adult.**

The information in this form is confidential. It should only be sent to the Director (sarah@baobabwomen.co.uk) (if about behaviour by a staff member or volunteer). It will then be held in a safe and secure place in accordance with data protection regulations. However, a court of law may require Baobab to disclose it as evidence. If the incident is about the Director, then the form should be sent to the Board c/o directors@baobabwomen.co.uk.

Please fill in as much of the form as possible. Leave blank any areas for which you have no information. If raising general concerns about observed behaviour, please make this clear.

<b>Part One – About You</b>
<b>Your name:</b>
<b>Your relationship to the child/ vulnerable adult:</b>
<b>Part Two – About the Child/Vulnerable adult</b>
<b>Child/ vulnerable adult's name:</b>
<b>Is the child/ vulnerable adult male or female?</b>
<b>Child/ vulnerable adult's address:</b>
<b>Who does the child/ vulnerable adult live with? Please give their names and dates of birth. What is the nature of their relationship?</b>
<b>Child/ vulnerable adult's date of birth/ age:</b>
<b>What is the ethnicity, first language and religion of the child/vulnerable adult?</b>
<b>What is the ethnicity, first language and religion of the parents of the child?</b>

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<b>Part Three – About Your Concern</b>
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<p><b>How did you come to have a concern?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Was abuse observed or suspected?</li><li>• Did a child/ vulnerable adult disclose abuse?</li><li>• Was an allegation of abuse made by another person?</li></ul>
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<p><b>Date(s), time(s) and location(s) of any incident(s):</b></p>
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<p><b>Nature of concern/allegation:</b></p>
<p><b>Name, address and date of birth of alleged perpetrator(s)</b> <b>Are they aware of your concerns?</b></p>



**Observations made by you (e.g. description of visible bruising, other injuries, child/vulnerable adult's emotional state etc)**

**N.B. Please make it clear whether each observation is fact, opinion or something you have been told.**

**Exactly what the child/ vulnerable adult has said and what you have said:**

**(Do not lead the child/ vulnerable adult by asking them yes/no questions– ask open-ended questions. Record details of conversation(s), continue on a separate sheet if necessary)**

**Any other information (e.g. does the child/ vulnerable adult have a disability/ learning difficulties/ find it difficult to communicate?)**

**Why do you think that they are a vulnerable adult?**

**What is their first language? Do they need an interpreter, signer or other communication aid?**

<b>Were any other children/ vulnerable adults involved?</b>
<b>Where is the child/vulnerable adult now?</b>
<b>Is the child/vulnerable adult aware of this referral?</b>
<b>Are the child's parents aware of this referral?</b>
<b>External agencies contacted (if any) – date and time. Name of person contacted and any advice received:</b>
<b>Action Taken:</b>
<b>Signed:</b> ..... . <b>Name: please print:</b> <b>Position:</b> <b>Date:</b> <b>Time:</b> <b>Contact details:</b>  <b>Signed</b> <b>by</b> <b>supervisor:...</b> ..... <b>Name: please print:</b> <b>Position:</b> <b>Date:</b> <b>Time:</b> <b>Contact details:</b>

**Information**  
 This policy should be circulated to all Baobab employees, the Management Committee members and volunteers.

This policy will be reviewed annually by the Baobab Directors.

Date Policy approved March 2019

Last review date January 2024

Next review date November 2024