



## **AIFS Child Complaint Policy and Handling Procedures**

### **Introduction and General Statement**

In order to effectively follow up a child protection report or concern lodged by a child, it is extremely important for AIFS to develop a set of clear, fair, safe and child friendly guideline(s)/procedure(s) to guide our staff and program participants through the complaints handling process. This will help to manage the report professionally and in a way that respects the best interests and legal rights of the child lodging the complaint.

AIFS will treat all concerns raised seriously, will ensure that all parties will be treated fairly, and the principles of natural justice will be a prime consideration. All reports will be handled professionally, confidentially, and expediently.

All reports made in good faith will be viewed as being made in the best interests of the child regardless of the outcomes of any investigation. AIFS will ensure that the interests of anyone reporting child abuse in good faith are protected.

The rights and welfare of the child is of prime importance. Every effort will be made to protect the rights and safety of the child throughout the investigation.

### **Policy**

This policy is inspired by AIFS' mission and values. AIFS is committed to responding to any disclosures and complaints made by children or young adults respectfully, actively and in a timely manner, in accordance with any lawful obligations and AIFS' Child Protection Policy and procedures. This includes contacting child protection services and / or the Police immediately where there may be risk of imminent harm.

AIFS will maintain the confidentiality of any complaints made and will process any complaint made by a child or a young person in a supportive and child friendly manner.

This policy applies to all AIFS Australia office staff as well as participants across all programs, volunteers and contractors engaged with the work of AIFS Australia.

### **Conflict of Interest**

It is important that safeguarding matters are managed in a way that ensure impartiality and objectivity. AIFS has a dedicated Child Protection Officer to ensure that all complaint processes are free from any actual or perceived conflict of interest. Therefore, any person who is involved in receiving, investigating, or advising on a complaint on professional standards matters must not be involved in a matter if that person:

- Is the subject of the complaint

- Has or had a close personal or working relationship with the person to whom the matter relates such that their judgement would or could be affected by the relationship and they would be placed in a position of actual or potential conflict.

## **Guiding Principles for managing child safety complaints/allegations**

1. Where a disclosure, allegation or suspicion of child abuse or harm is made, the priority in responding is always the safety and wellbeing of the child. To ensure this, on receipt of a complaint, the case is being reported to AIFS office staff.

The receiving person documents the receipt of a complain and forwards it immediately to the dedicated Child Protection Officer who conducts an immediate assessment to identify and minimize any risk to children or vulnerable adults.

Where a complaint is plausible further steps outlined in the AIFS Child Complaint Procedure are being taken.

In case of a complaint made towards an AIFS employee, a program participant or anyone engaged with the work of AIFS Australia, and if the complaint is classified as child abuse and there is a risk that the alleged perpetrator might come into contact with children or vulnerable adults, that person is stood down from their role while the complaint is investigated.

2. Everyone engaged with AIFS has a moral obligation to report any disclosure, complaint, allegation or suspicion of child abuse or harm to the AIFS Child Protection Officer. Where a child is in imminent danger, a report must be made to Police immediately.

All AIFS office staff must take part in mandatory Child Protection training upon their employment.

3. All incidents of abuse are to be viewed as damaging to children. Forms of child abuse include physical abuse, psychological/emotional abuse, sexual abuse, neglect, cultural/spiritual abuse, on-line abuse, grooming.

4. All relevant reporting, privacy and employment obligations are met.

5. Complainants are responded to promptly and relevant parties are kept informed of the progress of the complaint.

## **Handling Disclosures/Complaints from children or young adults**

AIFS has a Child Safety Policy in place and mandatory training on Child Protection and Safeguarding for all office staff and AIFS Au Pair program participants.

Handling Principles for AIFS staff and AU Pair program participants when a child discloses abuse of themselves or another:

- Listen to the child without interrupting or expressing shock or alarm. Be aware of the child's circumstances, especially those that increase the child's vulnerability.
- Do not ask questions except to clarify your general understanding of what the child is saying. Do not dismiss the incident even if you are unsure whether the child is making a disclosure or not. Any concern about possible risk to a child must be reported to the AIFS Child Protection Officer. If you are unsure whom to contact, call AIFS on 1300889067.

- Explain to the child that you cannot keep it a secret.
- Let the child know what you will do next, including with whom you need to share the information
- Reassure the child that they have done the right thing in telling you.
- As soon as possible, record the conversation including the date, time, and details of the disclosure. Avoid doing this in front of the child.
- Ring 000 immediately if you believe the child is in imminent danger and report your concerns to the police.
- Within 24 hours, inform AIFS Child Protection Officer who will manage the situation, including assisting you with mandatory reporting if required.
- Observe strict confidentiality within the process.
- Follow instructions given by AIFS Child Protection Officer

### **AIFS Child Complaint Procedure**

Every complaint will be handled in a positive manner and the child or young person who raises the complaint will be always treated respectfully and particular care and attention will be given due to young age of the person involved.

AIFS' complaints handling procedure in relation to handling a complaint from a child clearly outlines:

- The steps to be taken during an administrative/internal investigation (Please refer to AIFS Child Protection Policy).
- Roles and responsibilities including contact details for authorities, formal and nonformal child protection and support services (where they exist) to report and refer to (please refer to AIFS Child Protection Policy).
- AIFS Child Complaint Form

When a complaint made by a child is received it will be determined by the AIFS Child Protection Officer whether it can be resolved quickly and informally or is determined to be of a very serious nature. In any case, the following procedure should be used.

## AIFS Child or Young Person Complaint Handling Procedure



