



Child Engagement Guidance

Supervision, Ratios and Child Volunteers

Safeguarding Collection

Preface

The following child engagement guidance outlines active supervision standards, ratio requirements and child labor restrictions to ensure the safety and well-being of children on or off work sites and during activities.

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Age and activity standards for a Habitat for Humanity work site

These standards have been designed to ensure safe project environments for children. **This guidance applies during all volunteer projects and sweat-equity activities in which children and young people are involved.** Habitat entities, including branches and national organizations, are required to comply with child labor laws in their respective countries. Written informed consent and permissions of a parent or guardian must be on file at the entity for any child under the age of legal majority who takes part in work site activities. Children must give assent as part of their engagement on work sites or other Habitat projects.

NOTE: These activities are not exhaustive. The list may be edited and updated as project teams identify additional activities.



Construction activities

Birth–age 14

No construction work! (See “on-site” activities below.)

Ages 15–17

Children ages 15-17 may assume additional responsibilities in line with the guidelines for [ratio](#), [supervision](#) and [guidance for working with child volunteers](#), which may include:

- Carpentry.
- Siding.
- Laying foundations.
- Masonry.

Ages 18+

Young adults may engage in what is termed “dangerous work.” This work must still be performed under the supervision of a skilled tradesperson or expert. All risks associated with the work and safety precautions must be explicitly reviewed with young people.

- Working from a height greater than 6 feet or 180 centimeters.
- Roofing.
- Using power tools.
- Using electric- or gas-powered equipment.
- Using powder-actuated tools.
- Demolition.
- Excavation.



On-site (non construction) activities

Birth–age 3

Children may be present with their parents or guardians on the work site during sweat-equity projects as long as activities are safe (e.g., there is no danger to the child, such as stepping on nails or eating insulation/paint, etc.) and children are actively supervised.

Ages 4–8

Children may participate only when an accompanying parent or relative, a person 18 or older is present with the child. The following are examples of “accompaniment projects”:

- Cleaning (e.g., dusting with a hand sock or wiping down of areas on inactive construction sites).
- Watering plants or grass associated with landscape projects.
- Pulling weeds or helping to prepare for landscaping (i.e., very light effort).
- Singing a song at the house dedication ceremony.

Ages 9–13

Sweat-equity activities are acceptable for children ages 9-13 when performed under adult supervision and in line with guidelines for ratios. In addition to activities for ages 4-8, the following are examples of activities for this age group:

- Raking leaves or spreading mulch.
- Vacuuming or mopping areas to prepare for or cleanup after construction activities.
- Assisting with washing, drying and/or folding of household items (e.g., bedding, dishtowels, bath towels, etc.).
- Taking out garbage or disposing of light, **nonhazardous** waste materials that are in sturdy bags (i.e., children are not exposed to construction waste).
- Learning about the local environment and planting trees and gardens.
- Making picture frames, wooden key holders, doorstops or other items from scrap wood on site.

Ages 13–15

In addition to activities in the age groups above, only **light work** is acceptable for children ages 13-15 when performed under adult supervision and in line with guidelines for ratios. The following are examples of “light work” activities:

- Registering volunteers at the construction site information tables.
- Clearing lots.
- Painting.
- Landscaping.
- Carrying or moving supplies (weight limit appropriate to the child, but never more than 5-7 kilos).
- Playing with or helping to watch younger children and ensuring that they are not on work sites without adult supervision.

Light work is characterized by:

- Simple and well-defined tasks.
- No physical or mental effort that could endanger the child’s health or development.
- A limited number of daily and weekly hours of work.
- Regular breaks and weekly rest of at least 48 hours.
- No night work.

Ages 15–18

In addition to “light work,” children ages 15-18 may assume responsibilities in line with the guidelines for ratio, supervision, and guidance for working with child volunteers, such as the following activities:

- Salvaging any reusable or recyclable building materials after construction projects.
- Organizing and serving meals to volunteers during builds.
- Organizing educational tours for classmates to meet homeowners.
- Flooring.
- Finishing work (e.g., screwing in light bulbs, nailing on trim, etc.).
- General washing (e.g., windows, floors, etc.).

Ages 18+

Young adults may engage in what is termed “dangerous work.” This work must still be under the supervision of a skilled tradesperson or expert. All risks associated with the work and safety precautions must be explicitly reviewed with young people.

- Handling or disposing of hazardous waste (e.g., in proper containers and with the necessary safety gear and with clear instructions).
- Landscaping.
- Finishing work requiring the use of a ladder.
- Using a construction vehicle (if qualified and in possession of any necessary license or authorization).
- Mowing lawn.



Off-site (e.g., online) activities

Birth–age 5

Children may be present with their parents or guardian during online activities.

Ages 6–13

Children may engage in group projects to bring visibility about Habitat for Humanity’s work and mission. Examples of off-site activities include:

- Composing songs or poems to be shared at house dedication ceremonies.
- Making art for fundraising projects.

Ages 14–17

Children in this age range may contribute to activities outlined above and also participate in the following types of “off-site” projects:

- Scheduling online meetings.
- Organizing educational meetings for classmates to learn about the mission of Habitat.
- Organizing fundraisers for Habitat.
- Constructing “house banks” as fundraising tools for affiliates.
- Designing T-shirts to be sold at Habitat fundraisers.
- Assisting with the development or design of a website or newsletter for Habitat.
- Helping to fold or stuff newsletters for mailing.
- Contributing to the planning of a birthday card project for homeowners’ children.
- Accompanying a Habitat volunteer or representative to interview homeowners about Habitat’s impact on their lives.
- Writing a story for the local newspaper about Habitat’s mission or work.

Ages 18+

Young adults may assume more responsibility for “offline” projects. Examples include:

- Hosting or convening online meetings.
- Making T-shirts or other products designed to be sold at Habitat fundraisers.
- Designing or producing a webpage or newsletter for Habitat.
- Socializing Habitat’s mission through social media.
- Tutoring homeowners’ children (while observing the [two-adult rule](#)).
- Interviewing homeowners about the impact of Habitat on their lives.

Supervision

Active supervision

This applies to paid Habitat for Humanity staff members, parents or others responsible¹ for the supervision and care of children during Habitat projects or programs. It also applies when children may be informally engaged in activities or participating in Habitat operations.

Active supervision means that a paid staff member, a parent or another responsible adult will be able to see and hear the children throughout the project activity or volunteer project and will be able to intervene whenever the need arises. Children must never be out of visibility. Toileting plans should be developed for any activities or volunteer projects to ensure facilities are safe, accessible and developmentally appropriate (e.g., young children using proportionately sized toilets, children with disabilities accessing toilets, etc.). If toileting supervision is required, a parent or related adult must be present with the child to assist.

Observing the [ratio requirements](#), paid staff members must engage in active supervision of children who are participating in a Habitat activity or engaging in volunteer work.

Children with disabilities

Whenever Habitat is responsible for providing supervision, it is important to note that children with disabilities may require special supervision plans. In such instances, please coordinate with the child's parent to ensure adequacy of care during activities or volunteer projects. Meeting the special needs of a child is **not** considered preferential treatment or a demonstration of favoritism.

Gender-balanced supervision

Whenever Habitat staff members are responsible for providing or supporting the supervision of children, at least one adult female (e.g., a paid Habitat staff member, partner or key or regular volunteer) will be assigned at the project and program site where girls are present. This includes any in-person or online activities. Consideration should be given to ensure that the adult female is of the same "title" or "rank" as any male colleague to ensure that any power differentials do not affect or influence the ability of the female to serve in a protective capacity.

Parental supervision

Supervision is the act of watching or monitoring a child's activities. Parents have a particular responsibility to ensure that their children are safe and engage in healthful activities. Whenever risks or dangers are present during a Habitat activity where the parent cares for the children, it is the responsibility of the parent — in collaboration with Habitat for Humanity — to remove hazards or ensure the children are protected.

Any child younger than 5 should be in the care of a parent who is actively supervising and attending to their children, unless supervision is otherwise delegated to another responsible adult. Children older than 5 are generally able to play independently and identify their needs (e.g., hunger, thirst, bathroom use, injury, etc.). They are not, however, capacitated to make good judgments or informed decisions about activities that may impact their well-being or best interests. For this reason, it is important that parents participating in Habitat activities are clearly informed about their responsibilities to provide adequate supervision and care for their children or to delegate such responsibilities to another agreeable, responsible adult.

¹ The Child and Adult Safeguarding Policy defines a Habitat representative as an individual acting on behalf of Habitat for Humanity, including but not limited to board members, staff members, contractors, interns, AmeriCorps members (including VISTA members), volunteers, implementing partners and suppliers.

Child volunteer supervision

Active supervision applies to all activities, whether the child is a participant or a volunteer. During child volunteer activities, children are more likely to be working with their peers to achieve a shared goal. When children from the same or different backgrounds come together, it is an opportunity to learn, grow and experience something new. It is also a time when children can experience peer-on-peer harm, which may include but is not limited to:

- Sexual exploration or abuse — e.g., distinguishing between age-typical and harmful behaviors.
- Bullying and teasing.
- Physical harm — e.g., playful or harmful roughhousing, hitting, pushing, etc.
- Exclusion — e.g., cliques, discrimination, refusal to engage, etc.

It is important that these interactions are safe and healthy for every child. Child volunteers must be made aware not only of their right to be protected but also of their responsibilities to work safely on the project and engage in healthful interactions with their peers. Any Habitat staff member who observes a child hurting, bullying, excluding or otherwise engaging in harmful behavior toward another child or themselves (e.g., child self-harm) must immediately intervene to interrupt the behavior and seek further support to respond to the affected child and to the child acting in a harmful manner.

Ratios

In accordance with the Child and Adult Safeguarding Policy, there must always be a minimum of two adults when children are present during project activities, programming or volunteering; this is known as the “two-adult rule.” The composition of supervising adults may include two paid Habitat staff members, two partner staff members, or one paid Habitat or partner staff member and one key or regular Habitat volunteer. Habitat staff members partners, and volunteers should never be alone with a child participant or child volunteer. The child’s parent or an adult from the community will not fulfill the two-adult rule because of the power dynamics between Habitat and community members. For this reason, one paid staff member and one parent – except during certain activities² – is not acceptable. Depending on the age and development stage of the children, the following ratios are recommended:

Children younger than 6 years old

Two paid Habitat staff members³ for every three children. If parents⁴ are always present with the child and have been informed of their supervision responsibilities for their child, the two paid Habitat staff members are sufficient for ratio purposes, even if there are more than three total child participants.

Children 6–8 years old

Two paid Habitat staff members³ for every 10 children.⁵ If parents are always present with the child and have been informed of their supervision responsibilities for their child, the two paid Habitat staff members are sufficient for ratio purposes and no additional paid staff members are required, even if there are more than 10 child participants.

Children 9–12 years old

Two paid Habitat staff members³ for every 12 children. If parents are always present with the child and have been informed of their supervision responsibilities for their child, the two paid Habitat staff members are sufficient for ratio purposes and no additional paid staff members are required, even if there are more than 12 child participants.

Children 13–16 years old

Two paid Habitat staff members³ for every 15 children.

Children 17–18 years old

Two paid Habitat staff members³ for every 20 children.

Children with disabilities

For any child with a disability, please coordinate with the child’s parent to understand if one-on-one support is necessary so that disability-inclusive child safeguarding practices are observed.

² If there is a home visit, evaluation or repair in the home, it may not be possible to have two paid Habitat staff members present. Other exceptions may also apply, but this should be documented and anticipated during the project design and implementation.

³ Two paid Habitat staff members, two partner staff members, or one paid Habitat staff member and one key or regular Habitat volunteer (i.e., the two-adult rule).

⁴ Parent, legal guardian or responsible adult.

⁵ For example, if a project engages 20 children, four paid Habitat staff members should be present.

Guidance for working with child volunteers

A child is defined as any person younger than 18 years old. When developing volunteer opportunities for children, there are important criteria to consider. In the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, or UNCRC, the Declaration of the Rights of the Child states, “the child, by reason of his, [her, or their] physical and mental immaturity, needs special safeguards and care.”⁶ Habitat is responsible for ensuring the safety and well-being of children involved in volunteer projects.

When children volunteer, they should expect to have a positive, enriching experience that provides opportunities to learn and develop. Whenever children will be a part of a volunteer project, it is important to ensure that a safeguarding risk assessment has been completed. The risk assessment will identify preventable risks and support project teams to implement corresponding mitigations. It is important that when assessing risks, projects teams are considering the following:

- The physical environment.
- The type of work or labor involved.
- Interactions with paid Habitat staff members.
- Interactions with adult Habitat volunteers.
- Interactions with Habitat partners.
- Interactions with community members.
- Interactions with other children (peers).

Because of their age, dependency on adults, size, and developmental or cognitive stage, children are more vulnerable to experiencing harm, abuse, exploitation, discrimination, and peer-to-peer bullying. These risks heighten when child volunteers are living in vulnerable communities and contexts. For this reason, it is important to ensure that the volunteer experience is not exploiting children and that appropriate safeguards are in place to reduce the likelihood of exploitation.

The subsections that follow outline some of the more common risks associated with child volunteers and give examples of how to mitigate those risks. It is not exhaustive, and risk assessments should be done for each location and context where different risks may be present.

Risk: Child labor exploitation

Questions

- Are child volunteers asked to do something for free that others would or do get paid to do? If so, what is the justification for creating a volunteer vs. paid opportunity?
- Who benefits from the volunteer work? What is the benefit to the child?
- Are the hours limited and reasonable? Is travel time to and from the volunteer site reasonable?
- Is there safe and free (or subsidized) transportation to and from the volunteer site?
- Is the volunteer work safe?
- Will children have adequate supervision?
- Are child volunteers given the necessary tools to complete the volunteer work?

Indicators

Volunteer justification

If a project was planning to use paid support but was redesigned to use child labor under the auspices of a volunteer opportunity, this is exploitation.

⁶ <https://www.unicef.org/child-rights-convention/convention-text>

Volunteer hours:

- **Should not** interfere with a child's school attendance. All volunteer work should be designed to avoid school hours and allow for children to participate in after-school activities.
- **Should not** be excessive. Hours should be limited to allow for children to have time for proper sleep, adequate rest, recreation, and time with family and friends. Socialization is an important part of child development, and interactions with peers are essential for healthy growth and relationships.
- **Should never** be forced. Children should be able to opt in and out of volunteer work without pressure or manipulation.
- **Should not** be required for Habitat to fulfill its commitment to delivering services or programs. Unless the program has been designed to incorporate child participation, services and programs cannot be withheld if children refuse to volunteer.

Child volunteer work:

- **Should not** be dangerous or unsafe. Children should not be doing any physical labor that could result in injury or harm. (Please refer to the guidance on child labor that Habitat has developed.)
- **Should not** put children in contact with harmful materials, substances or chemicals.
- **Should not** involve using heavy, dangerous or faulty equipment.
- **Should not** be menial or rote work (e.g., moving things from one location to another day after day). Volunteer opportunities should teach new skills and problem solving and enrich development.
- **Should not** be unsupervised or involve meeting one-on-one with adults or older children.
- **Should not** benefit a specific individual unless it is part of a homeowner family's "sweat equity" project or other specific Habitat project where this intention is clear. If the work benefits a specific group, it should be articulated clearly in the project design and targeted to address social inequities as opposed to enriching people in positions of power or trust.

Mitigation measures**Avoid child labor exploitation**

- Articulate zero tolerance for child labor exploitation. Anyone engaging in such behaviors should be immediately removed from the project, and the issue should be reported in line with Habitat's policies.
- Children should be encouraged to attend school on a regular basis. For cultures where children stop attending at an early age or where educational opportunities are not extended to girls, it is important to consider the social impact of volunteer work – both positive and negative – as a replacement for formal education.
- Plan the volunteer work to ensure that hours do not exceed reasonable hours, including the times of day or days of the week when volunteer work is planned.
- Children should always be consulted about participating in volunteer work. The child and their caregiver should always be engaged in the informed consent and assent process to ensure knowledge of risks and benefits, along with the ability to decline further participation at any time.
- Establish clear start and end dates for the volunteer project and ensure this is effectively communicated.
- Ensure compliance with Habitat policies and/or local labor laws, whichever affords the greatest protection to children.

Work should:

- **Be safe** with clear protocols for maintaining a physical environment that is conducive to children and free of hazards.
- **Be educational, skill building, and/or trade related.** Children should be learning and growing as part of their social and emotional development. Any work that stunts development should be deemed harmful and not suitable for children.
- **Always be supervised.** A minimum of two adults should be present where any children are volunteering or present, in accordance with Habitat's Safeguarding Policy.

- **Be beneficial to the community.** Children should be able to see the impact of their volunteerism and how it lifts up their community. When inequities are perpetuated, this can be harmful for children's social and emotional development.

Risk: Sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) of children

Questions

- Have all Habitat representatives with whom child volunteers will be in contact been properly vetted and socialized with Habitat's Safeguarding Policy and the Ethics Covenant/Code of Conduct?
- Have safeguards been established to ensure that child volunteers are not alone with older peers or adults?
- Are child volunteers aware of how to report a concern? Is there a safe person with whom the child can speak? Have children been asked to whom they would prefer to disclose a concern?
- Is the community aware of the role of child volunteers and that there is to be no exchange of services for sex or sexual favors?
- Are physical environments where children will be volunteering well-lit?
- Are bathrooms safe for child volunteers to access? Are bathroom facilities secured from an inside lock? Are facilities in a public area where people moving in and out are easily observed (e.g., children are not in isolated areas)?
- Are bathroom facilities separated by sex or gender and accessible for children of all gender expressions?

Indicators

There may be increased risk of:

- Forging relationships with older peers or adults as part of volunteer work. **Children are most at risk of being sexually abused by someone they know and trust, including adults and older peers.**
- Grooming. There should be greater vigilance when child volunteers are working in a location or throughout the community. Intersecting identities may heighten the risk of a child to be groomed for abuse. For example, risk increases if the child has a cognitive or physical disability⁷ or if their parents or caretakers are not particularly attentive or able to meet their emotional, physical or social needs.
 - Research has shown that children with disabilities are twice as likely to experience abuse than their non-disabled peers.
 - 1 in 10 children with disabilities experience sexual violence.
 - 18% of LGBTQI+ youth have been forced to have sexual intercourse at some point in their lives.⁸
- Social, emotional or economic isolation, which may increase vulnerability to continued SEA. Histories of abuse can make children more vulnerable and less likely to disclose the abuse, depending on past experiences.
- Internalizing sexual exploitation and abuse as their fault. Children may not know they are being abused, or they may believe that their behavior contributed to the abuse. For this reason, children may be reluctant to disclose abuse for fear that they will be blamed or that nobody will believe them.
- Pressure to engage in unwanted sexual activity to continue with volunteer work that is beneficial to the child, the child's family or the community. Children must be aware that their ability to participate in enriching volunteer experiences is **never** contingent on the exchange of sex or sexual favors with anyone — peers or adults.

Mitigation measures

Protection against sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA):

- Articulate zero tolerance for SEA. Any child, young person or adult engaging in such behaviors should be immediately removed from the project, and reporting procedures must be followed in accordance with Habitat for Humanity policies.

⁷ [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanchi/article/PIIS2352-4642\(22\)00033-5/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanchi/article/PIIS2352-4642(22)00033-5/fulltext)

⁸ Kann L, Olsen EO, McManus T, et al. *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report "Surveillance Summaries"* 2016; 65(9): 1-202.

- Socialize policies and practices with child volunteers, older peers and adults.
- Ensure that there is adequate supervision and that two adults are always present in environments where children are present. This applies to both programming and volunteer activities involving children.
- Be aware of signs that grooming⁹ may be happening:
 - Showing favoritism to a child.
 - Isolating a child from other children or their parents/caregiver.
 - Having secrets with a child.
 - Special gifts or attention toward a specific child or children.¹⁰
 - Grooming the parents or colleagues to normalize time and attention given to the child.
 - Using “normal” or “typical” touch to desensitize the child to touch (e.g., increasing the type or frequency of touch and then expanding how touch is used to normalize it with the child).
 - Looking to be the “hero,” “good person” or “savior” who is always good.
- Children do not always disclose SEA, so it is important to create regular check-ins to ensure that children's experiences are safe, healthy and abuse-free.
- Establish reporting mechanisms that are easily accessible to children.
- Establish clear boundaries to ensure safe and healthy interactions, including when physical touch is or is not appropriate.
- Socialize the role of child volunteers with the community. If there is a benefit that a community member is seeking, they should be in contact with an adult representative of Habitat for Humanity.
- Ensure easy access to the volunteer site that is void of isolated areas, poorly lit environments or areas known for community problems.
- Provide accessible toileting areas to child volunteers that are in public spaces but offer privacy and locks in the facility (not on the outside).

Risk: Gender stereotyping

Questions

- Does the work perpetuate harmful gender stereotypes?
- If volunteer tasks and activities are assigned based on traditional gender roles, how might this impact boys, girls and nonbinary children?
- Are boys and girls required to be separated due to culture? If so, in what ways can gender mainstreaming happen to break down barriers?
- Is the volunteer work inclusive for children of all gender expressions and identities? For example, how might children who identify as nonbinary be included and feel a belonging in volunteer work that may be divided according to traditional gender roles?
- Are children allowed to select the types of tasks they would like to undertake? Are options provided? Are all volunteer tasks similar in nature?
- How are children given praise or constructive feedback throughout their volunteer work? Be aware of conscious or unconscious gender biases when communicating with children. Comments can be harmful, even if well intended. For example: Telling a boy, “Wow! Great job — you’re so strong.” Or telling a girl, “Well done! You’re so kind.” Remember: Girls can be strong, and boys can be kind. Comments can also perpetuate emotionally and socially harmful gender roles. An example might be telling a boy, “Come on. You can do it. You’re smart.” Or telling a girl, “This is a difficult task, so it’s OK if you can’t do it.” Gender socialization might unknowingly dictate how adults speak to children.

⁹ The process in which an adult or older child or young person builds a relationship with a child and/or the child’s caretaker to gain the child’s and caretaker’s trust for the purposes of sexually abusing or exploiting the child. Grooming can happen online or in person and is a gradual process that can sometimes be difficult to detect. Please refer to the Child and Adult Safeguarding Policy for examples included in the definition section.

¹⁰ If any gifts are distributed to children, including candies, chocolates or any type of toys, they must be given to all children and organized by Habitat’s staff. Volunteers should not give, share or distribute gifts without prior approval or accompaniment by a Habitat staff member.

Indicators

Be aware of volunteer work that might:

- Perpetuate unsafe, unhealthy or non-inclusive gender roles and stereotypes. This may include assigning girls to work traditionally identified as feminine while boys are given work that is deemed more masculine.
- Exclude children from equitable opportunities to learn and develop. Volunteer opportunities should be inclusive and seek to break down barriers and preconceived ideas about work division along gender or sex.
- Fail to acknowledge that not all children identify as a boy or girl. Using the wrong pronoun with a child is harmful to their psychological, emotional and social development.
- Unconsciously benefit boys over girls. Boys may be given the opportunity to engage in volunteer work that builds on a skill or trade, which they can later use for paid work.
- Impact social status. Girls may be expected to engage in traditional roles that balance contributing to the community via volunteer work, along with tending to chores at home. Work performed by girls might not be viewed as important or valuable. Boys may be more likely to be paid for their work or viewed as able to contribute more value.

Mitigation measures

Promote inclusion, belonging and gender mainstreaming.

- Articulate zero tolerance for gender discrimination. Any adult engaging in such behaviors should be immediately removed from the project. If a child or young person is engaged in such behavior, it is important to speak with and explain the harm of such behavior before determining if removal from the project is necessary. This allows children to learn and “try on” a new way of thinking.
- In the program design and implementation, benefits and risks should be contemplated and identified (e.g., gender analysis) with respect to gender impact.
- There should be awareness and sensitivity about the use of language (e.g., how work is described/explained, pronoun use, division of volunteer tasks to children when gender is a factor), how feedback and praise are given, and how goals are established for children to promote satisfaction and fulfillment.
- Ensure that all child volunteer work conforms with the standards of gender mainstreaming adopted through Habitat’s operations and programming activities.
- Seek to establish equitable benefits for boys, girls and nonbinary children.
- Be conscious of the demands that may be placed on girls to perform volunteer work while balancing the demands of schoolwork and home chores.
- Be aware of how boys may be targeted to assume volunteer work as a path toward paid work, and how this can be exploitative and harmful to social and psychological development.

Risk: Bullying

Questions

- Are there clear expectations about how to appropriately speak with child volunteers?
- Have child volunteers been informed that there is zero tolerance for child-to-child or adult-to-child bullying?
- Have clear rules been set about conflict resolution and fighting (e.g., verbal or physical altercations)?
- Are expectations about communication and interactions clear to everyone working on the volunteer project?

Indicators

Children experiencing bullying may exhibit signs of:

- Unexplained injuries.
- Poor self-esteem.
- Fear of certain individuals — peers, older children or adults.
- Damaged or destroyed belongings (e.g., clothing, bags and other items carried on their person).

- Disheveled appearance (e.g., dirty, hair in disarray, etc.).
- Fatigue or exhaustion (e.g., poor sleep, worrying).
- Lack of concentration or hypervigilance.
- Self-isolation (e.g., removing themselves from events with other peers or activities in the volunteer work that involve others).

Mitigation measures

Create safe and healthy interactions:

- Articulate zero tolerance for bullying. Any child, young person or adult engaging in such behaviors should be immediately removed from the project.
- Make reporting channels known and accessible.
- Establish clear expectations about behaviors to ensure that there is no verbal or physical bullying.
- Create spaces where child volunteers work cooperatively together and where each is given responsibility to establish their importance and contributions.
- Define how expectations will be communicated with child volunteers to avoid the appearance of bullying and ensure the communication is comfortable and effective for all.
- Schedule regular check-ins with child volunteers to understand their experience and ensure that they feel safe and respected while working on the project.

Special considerations for online events with children

Before the online event

- At least two Habitat representatives are present and responsible for convening the online event.
- Whenever girls are present online, at least one Habitat representative should be a female/woman to ensure appropriate gender balance and create a safe environment.
- Children and their parents or guardians should be informed of the “dos” and “don’ts” associated with participating in the online event.
- Review rules about the online event with children and their parents or guardians before **and** at the onset of the video conference.
- All Habitat representatives online must ensure anything in their background (e.g., screen view) is appropriate. Please remove:
 - Any alcohol bottles or containers.
 - Personal images and/or family photos (e.g., especially beach or swimwear photos).
 - Artwork that may contain any form of nudity or express personal beliefs or ideologies.
 - Other personal materials that may create discomfort or distraction or may otherwise be inappropriate for children to view.

Planning the online event

- Do not make meetings or classrooms¹¹ public. On most videoconferencing platforms, there are two options to make a meeting private:
 - Require a meeting password.
 - Use the waiting room feature and control the admittance of guests.
- Do not share a link to a videoconference or classroom on an unrestricted, publicly available social media post. Provide the link directly to specific people (e.g., a parent, a teacher, another Habitat representative).
- Manage screen-sharing options. In most platforms, you can change screen-sharing to “host only.”
- Online platforms regularly update their software. Ensure that users are using the updated version of remote access/meeting applications.
- Receive parental or guardian permission for the child to participate in online projects or programs.
 - Ensure that the parent or guardian is present at the physical location where the child or young person is using a computer or personal device.
 - When applicable, provide instructions before an online event for parents or guardians to manage parental settings for the specific online platform.

During the online event

- Disable private chats between participants. If private chats cannot be disabled, parents or guardians should be aware of the need to supervise the event.
- Do not allow private recordings or photos during programming, including “screenshots” of children on video. If a “screenshot” is being captured for business purposes, obtain permission before the event via an informed consent from the parent or guardian and child assent.
- Only first names of children should be displayed on the screen. This helps to protect children from unwanted contact by another child or supervising parent, guardian or other adult who may be online with their child.

¹¹ Online events that may be used with schools or to provide educational or learning opportunities to children about Habitat’s mission.

- If a child requires one-on-one support to participate in the online event, please speak with the parent or guardian to ensure they are present.
- Do not exchange any contact information with children during the online event.

After the online event

- Ensure confidentiality and that child data is protected. The following examples are not exhaustive:
 - Names and contact information of children are not posted or shared publicly.
 - Photos of children are not shared with other information that can be triangulated to identify who they are or their whereabouts.
 - School information is not publicly shared with photos or names of children.
- Do not contact any child directly. Any follow-up communication must be made through a parent or guardian.

Annex I: Child assent checklist

Child assent is the process by which a child participates in decision-making that impacts them. Essentially, child assent involves the approval or agreement from a child for a specific or general purpose. Child assent includes but is not limited to taking a photo, filming, using a story, engaging in a project or program, or using sensitive data associated with the child.

Children have the right to be heard and express their opinions, preferences and levels of comfort with activities in which they are involved. It is widely recognized that children not only have the right to self-determination but also often have the capacity to make such judgments. Children's assent **should be considered progressively**, according to their age, emotional and cognitive development, degree of maturity, and discernment. The following is a sample script that may be used to ensure adequacy of child assent during projects and programs involving children and child volunteers.

Photography, film and stories

The project leader should update the checklist by filling in the areas outlined in blue.

- We are [taking photos, filming, gathering stories] for [purpose]. We will be using the [photo, video, story] to [how will it be used] and through [identify specific platforms (e.g., news, social media, internal communications, donor reports, etc.)]. We will use only your first name, photos and nonspecific location to ensure your safety.
- We use [photos, videos, stories] for fundraising purposes. Fundraising means that we ask people to give money so that Habitat for Humanity can continue to support children, families and communities like yours with [housing, schools, specific construction projects, etc.]. The money that we receive [is or is not] directly given to you, your family or others in the community.
- It is important that you feel comfortable with your [photo, video, story]. If you feel uncomfortable at any time or you change your mind, please let [your parent/guardian, assigned Habitat community representative, etc.] know.
- You can ask questions at any time. If you would like to see how your [photograph, video or story] will be used, we would be most happy to share it with you before we [make it public, post it, use it in communications, etc.].
- If you decide that you don't want to [have your photo taken, be filmed, or share your story], it is OK. You will not be in trouble or punished. We will not withhold any [services, programs, activities, benefits, etc.] from you, your family or your community.
- The risks involved include [list risks in age- and developmentally appropriate language (e.g., we will not be able to remove a photo from the news or internet once it has been made public, etc.)]
- If it's OK with you, we would like to give you some time to think about this. Maybe you would like to talk with [your mom, dad, guardian, relative, friends, etc.] to make this decision. We will come back [in a few hours, tomorrow, in a few days, next week] to check in with you.

If the child assents (and parental/guardian informed consent has been received), let the child and their family know the contact person and information of the Habitat representative should there be additional questions or a request to rescind. Assent may be verbal or written, depending on age, culture or other factors.

If written assent is used, please consider the following structure:

Child's printed name (by parent)

Age

Date

Child's printed or signed name (by child)

Habitat representative's printed name

Habitat representative's signature

Project or program participation including sensitive data collection

- Habitat for Humanity has developed [project or program] for [purpose].
- (If applicable) Sensitive data is information about a person that may reveal their identity or different types of information that could be — but aren't always — used to identify or locate someone. We will be using [sensitive data such as names, ages, locations, disabilities, ethnicity, race, language, gender, education, etc.] to [how will it be used]. The data will be [how it will be shared or used with donors, partners, public]. We will use only data for the specific reasons that we have shared with you.
- It is important that you feel comfortable participating in [the project or program] and [the use of any sensitive data]. If you feel uncomfortable at any time or you change your mind, please let [your parent/guardian, assigned Habitat community representative, etc.] know.
- You can ask questions at any time. If you would like more information about [the project or program or use of sensitive data], we would be most happy to share it with you before we [start, design, implement, etc.].
- If you decide that you don't want to participate in [the project or program], it is OK. You will not be in trouble or punished. (If there are anticipated negative consequences to the child's refusal, please ensure that they are discussed with the child and parent or guardian together. Otherwise, proceed with:) We will not withhold any [services, programs, activities, benefits, etc.] from you, your family or your community.
- The risks involved [with participation or use of sensitive data] include [list risks in age and developmentally appropriate language].
- If it's OK with you, we would like to give you some time to think about this. Maybe you would like to talk with [your mom, dad, guardian, relative, friends, etc.] to make this decision. We will come back [in a few hours, tomorrow, in a few days, next week] to check in with you.

If the child assents (and parental or guardian informed consent has been received), let the child and their family know the contact person and information of the Habitat representative should there be additional questions or a request to rescind. Assent may be verbal or written, depending on age, culture or other factors.

If written assent is used, please consider the following structure:

Child's printed name (by parent)

Age

Date

Child's printed or signed name (by child)

Habitat representative's printed name

Habitat representative's signature

every
hand
makes a difference



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