

Guidance for online child safeguarding for service providers ¹

Especially as a result of the COVID-19 situation, services providers, children and their families have turned to digital solutions such as using mobile devices, social networking sites and the internet more than ever to support children's learning, socialization and play. While digital solutions provide huge opportunities for sustaining and promoting children's rights, if used inappropriately these same tools may also increase children's exposure to online risks. The increased time spent by children on-line or connected to educators or other service providers via the internet, or via mobile phones could pose a risk to the children, especially if they are left without parental supervision while using those platforms and media.

The purpose of this guidance note is to ensure that communication by the service providers with the children is safe for children by promoting awareness and mitigating the risks of or actual harm that children may face by service providers and others. Keeping children safe online is a shared responsibility.

All service providers such as community and youth centers, schools and parents must work together to ensure that children's online experiences are safe and positive.

These guidelines set out the key priorities and recommendations on how to mitigate those risks and promote positive online experiences for children. Please see Annex 1: Slide Decks for main points and practical tips to complement these guidelines.

Safeguarding: is the responsibility of organizations to make sure their staff, operations, and programs do no harm to children and adults, nor expose them to abuse or exploitation, including online or via mobile phones.

Social Media: Forms of electronic communication/content used to share information, comments, messages, images, video and other content via a Social Network.

Online sexual exploitation: Spending more time online may increase the likelihood that children come into contact with online predators. Physical distancing measures are likely to increase children's outreach to new contacts and groups online, which could be exploited by predators to groom children for sexual exploitation.

Cyberbullying: is a major concern among teenagers and has wide-ranging, negative impacts. The COVID-19 pandemic has also introduced instant messaging, online gaming and chat services to an increasing number of young children, who may have limited online experience and be less resilient to hurtful behavior.

¹ Developed in April 2020 by UNICEF Jordan Country Office in response to the Covid 19 pandemic

Girls, children with disabilities, children with mental health issues, children in minority group and those perceived to be different or at greater risk of catching or spreading COVID-19 may be at increased risk of online bullying, discrimination.

Online risk-taking behavior: A lack of in-person interaction with friends and partners may lead children to engage in riskier behavior online, for example, through **sexting** or the sharing of self-generated sexualized content, which may expose them to risks of extortion, harassment and humiliation.

Potentially harmful content: Increased online activity may expose children to age-inappropriate and potentially harmful content, including content that is violent, misogynistic, xenophobic, promotes political or ideological violence or incites suicide and self-harm.

Remember! The child's **best interest** should always be our primary consideration

Remember! the Online Child Safeguarding Policy and Code of Conduct applies to your personal and professional lives, and all use of social media should be governed by the principles of respecting and protecting children. To ensure that children are safe and represented with dignity and care require concerted, urgent action so the following technical guidelines have been developed:

1. Empower children online:

Do discuss internet safety with children/ beneficiaries regularly and authentically. Teach them to keep personal **online** information private.²

Do agree with the child depending on their ages about rules of using the Internet and personal devices, giving attention to issues of privacy, age inappropriate places, bullying and stranger danger.

Do inform children about how to seek out help and support. Children should also be encouraged to use their voices online to support others in need of help.

Do tell children how to report any abuse or concerns.³

Do encourage children to report bad behavior and leave unpleasant conversations.

2. Support parents and caregivers to help children stay safe online

² Do encourage children to protect their online information by creating password also ask themselves "If you wouldn't do it face to face - Don't do it online" For example, talking to strangers. **Do remind children that online is still the real world.**

³ Children can report abuse through all available national helpline/hotline, U-Report or to parents, teachers, trusted mentor.

Do support parents/caregivers with appropriate guidance and tools to help children stay safe online (see slide decks 8-10).

Do seek permission from the parents/caregivers (Parental consent) to carry out one-on-one session or group sessions.⁴

Do make sure to secure prior parental consent if you need to record the online sessions/interactions.

Do alert parents/caregivers to the online risks for children such as: sexual exploitation, self-harm, cyberbullying and other types of online abuse might children experience.

Do inform parents/caregivers on how to respond to and, if needed, report harmful contacts, conduct and content.

Do tell parents/caregivers to establish with their children rules for how, when and where the Internet can be used.

Don't contact a child's caregivers/parents for purposes of connecting with other family members for reasons beyond professional concerns around the child.

3. Provide a safe online learning experience for children.

Do no harm to any child. Avoid questions, attitudes or comments that are judgmental or insensitive to cultural values or status, that place a child in danger or expose a child to humiliation.

Do update guidance for teachers/ service providers on identifying and reporting child abuse or neglect via their virtual communications.

Don't exchange personal contact information or ask for children's personal information.

Don't develop relationships with children which could in any way be deemed exploitative or abusive.

Don't use language, make suggestions, provide misleading information or offer advice to Children which is inappropriate, offensive or abusive;

Don't send private messages via email and social media to children.

Don't ask children to open their webcams.

Don't give any confidential and critical information that could lead to a child being identified or traced.

4. Make online platforms safe and accessible for children.

⁴ A copy of a signed permission document/consent may be scanned and send back with date and copy of an identity verification such as parent's scanned ID or UNHCR certificate this can be verified later through randomly call check.

Do adapt online safety resources to different age groups of children you are reaching and making these resources more accessible on their platforms to inform children, parents /caregivers of online risks and provide access to support services.

Do create or update your current safeguarding policies to reflect the new realities for children learning, playing, engaging in activities from home.

Do ensure all one-on-one online interactions between staff and children are transparent and regulated.

Do ensure all direct conversations/ communicating with children are done via professional channels whenever possible, such as the official software/ platform or an official social media account if they exist. (If you have had an occasion to communicate directly with a child, your line manager must be informed, and alternatives means of communication arranged such as phone call)

Do inform children that social media channels are established for the purpose they are created for and should be only used for that purpose. Content that is irrelevant to the purpose should be not be shared.

Do share rules for mobile use and adapt Safeguarding policies, anti-bullying rules among your WhatsApp/Facebook groups.

When setting up Social Media groups follow these ground rules:

- Take into account ages of children and involve parents as age appropriate.
- A Facebook group can be different than a WhatsApp group. WhatsApp groups in general should be smaller and with those who know each other for easier interaction and moderating discussion. Whereas Facebook groups can be larger, and members do not necessarily know each other. Membership should be based on admission criteria established. The ground rules should be specified adhering to core values, non-discrimination, inclusion, etc. Moderator should monitor the posts that are submitted before approving them, and closely monitor the comments made.

When posting

- Do always keep to the purpose of the group!
- Don't share irrelevant messages about other topics.
- Do monitor what is shared/posted.
- Do not post in any group between 9:00 pm and 08:00 am unless it is an all-out emergency.
- Don't send data-sensitive messages.
- Do always ask yourself these three questions before you post: 1. Is this relevant? 2. Is this necessary? 3. Is this a good time to post?

Don't expose children to inappropriate images, films, music and websites including mature content, indecent images (pornography) and violence.

Don't discuss or share, via social media any sensitive, confidential data or internal matters concerning children.

Don't use your personal social media to conduct work activities if you have an official one.

If providing remote phone support to children at home: Please refer to Child Protection Case Management Guidance for Remote Phone Follow-up in Covid-19 and other possible infectious diseases.⁵ April 2020

5. Strengthening your organization's prevention, response and support services.

DO follow organizational policies and guidelines of Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) and Child Protection Policy and Cyberbullying.

DO report Child Abuse, and PSEA and take all allegations, concerns and suspicions of abuse seriously including the online child safeguarding concerns.

Do follow your organizational reporting and referral system.

Important!

On-line crimes involving sexual abuse or violence against children can be reported to Unit on Prevention of Online Child Sexual Exploitation (UPOCSE) under the Family Protection Department (FPD).

Other On-line crime related complaints can be reported directly to the Cyber Crime Unit under the Criminal Investigation Unit that is part of the Public Security Department.

Once 911 is called, the case will be referred to the above-mentioned unit/s according to their mandate and the circumstances of each case.

UNICEF supported the Family Protection Department (FPD) in establishing the Unit on Prevention of Online Child Sexual Exploitation (UPOCSE) in 2017 and has invested heavily in high tech programs and staff which enables the unit to investigate such crimes and obtain evidence using latest technologies.

Cybercrimes and online violations are punishable by the Jordan Information Systems and Cyber Crime Law specifically under articles 9 & 12.

⁵ <http://www.socialserviceworkforce.org/system/files/resource/files/CP-Case-Management-Remote-Phone-Followup-COVID19.pdf>

Resources

<https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/covid-19-children-heightened-risk-abuse-neglect-exploitation-and-violence-amidst>

<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/online-safety/>

<https://www.cybersafetycop.com/covid-19-and-your-childs-online-safety/>

<https://www.unicef.org/media/67396/file/COVID-19%20and%20Its%20Implications%20for%20Protecting%20Children%20Online.pdf>

<http://www.socialserviceworkforce.org/system/files/resource/files/CP-Case-Management-Remote-Phone-Followup-COVID19.pdf>

<https://www.stopbullying.gov/cyberbullying/prevention>

<https://parentinfo.org/article/coronavirus-how-to-help-children-spot-fake-news>

https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/globalassets/professional/thinkuknow_primary_parents_help_sheet.pdf

The Safeguarding Essentials online training course available in Arabic and English

<https://kayaconnect.org/course/info.php?id=1424>,

<https://kayaconnect.org/course/info.php?id=2187>

Prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA) available in Arabic and English on:

<https://agora.unicef.org/course/info.php?id=18168>,

<https://agora.unicef.org/course/info.php?id=7380>