SafeShelter Guide

Child Safeguarding in Women's Shelters

safeshelter.aoef.at

The SafeShelter Guide draws on a needs analysis performed at the start of the project via interviews conducted with 41 children and 60 mothers temporarily residing in shelters as well as 89 staff working in women's shelters. These key target groups were asked about how they perceive Child Safeguarding and what recommendations they have for improving it in shelters. The Guide is aligned with European and international legally binding instruments as well as relevant Council of Europe policies, recommendations and guidelines, including the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), 1989; the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (ECHR), ETS No. 5, 1950; the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention), CETS No. 210, 2011; and the Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the Child (2016–2021).

The target group of this Guide are all women's shelter staff who have children residing in the shelter, as well as all professionals and agencies they work with in order to safeguard children. The Guide includes research and experience drawn from the SafeShelter project and incorporates feedback from children, their mothers residing in shelters in 6 EU countries involved in the project activities, in addition to staff working in the shelters.

The photos in the Guide are purchased and persons depicted are not associated with the topic of Child Safeguarding.

Two Advisory Board members also provided their expertise in the writing of the Guide. Vijay Baskar is Senior Child Safeguarding Adviser at Keeping Children Safe, an independent not-for-profit created to develop internationally recognised Child Safeguarding standards to ensure that all organizations working directly for and with children have comprehensive safeguarding measures in place. Medina Johnson is CEO of IRISi, a social enterprise established to promote and improve the healthcare response to gender-based violence (**irisi.org**).

The Guide also includes open source content freely available from Keeping Children Safe: **keepingchildrensafe.global**

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> *"They (the shelter staff) were always there and gave their best - that was really great!"* — 19-year-old man/boy, former resident at a women's shelter

About the quotes used in this guide:

Overall, the responses of the women and children that were interviewed as part of the SafeShelter project in all the partner countries were overwhelmingly positive. Most children felt very safe at the women's shelter. Both children and mothers very much appreciated the work of the shelter staff and the care and support that they received.

> *"I just felt very happy and safe while I was there."* — 15-year-old girl, former resident at a women's shelter

The main goal of the SafeShelter project and this guide is to support women's shelters with Child Safeguarding and respective measures and policies. Therefore, most quotes from mothers and children have been selected to reflect aspects of safety and protection that should be worked on more in the future. Since the quotes come from interviews in six different countries, some are country-specific and might not be representative for the situation in women's shelters in other countries.

Part I. Introduction

Introduction

The term women's shelter and respectively "SafeShelter" primarily indicates that these organisations work with women who are affected and threatened by violence, who seek shelter, protection and safety. One main principle of women's shelters is: women working for women.

While this is true and important, women's shelters are also children's shelters! It was women's shelters who first realised that children are always also affected when their mother is a victim of abuse. Violence against children is the most common form of domestic violence. Early on, women's shelters recognised the children's need for protection and support in cases of domestic violence. Often, shelters are the only places where children can live in safety for a period of time.

Additionally, women's shelters offer more than just "a roof above one's head", but also extensive support and a wide range of services such as professional supervision and consultation, medical and psycho-social care and individual support for building an independent life free from violence. Some of these services and programmes are specifically for women and mothers, others are designed for children and adolescents. Some women need interpreters when dealing with authorities or local government bodies, and often multilingual staff members provide that assistance.

The staff do professional and high-quality work, even though shelters are often understaffed and lacking financial resources so that not even minimum standards can be met.

Women's shelters always strive to provide quality support for women and children affected by violence and abuse. During the years, services have been improved and adapted to the needs of the residents and to the developments in the respective communities. Besides their central work and services, women's shelters engage

in political, that is socio-political work. It was and still is they who push for reform and improvement of victim's rights and keep working on these issues.

One minimum standard is that many women's shelters (in Austria it is all of them) have at least one accommodation unit for women with children, which has not always been the case. Another minimum standard is support for children by special staff members dedicated to them. Often these are specially trained and sensitised educators, sometimes psychologists and therapists who can work through traumatic experiences of violence.

Some women's shelters offer leisure time programmes with male educators to convey positive examples of masculinity to the children. Sometimes, shelters can also accommodate boys over the age of 14, meaning that they can stay with their mothers.

Women's shelters provide quality work and follow international standards. In order to meet and keep up these standards, resources are necessary. However, often such resources are not available, so that only basic support can be offered. In such cases, children can be accommodated but are not offered individual care plans or support and cannot be fostered and strengthened according to their needs.

> ## Women's shelters provide quality work and follow international standards

Experience has shown that sometimes women's shelters accommodate many children but only one staff member is present. Pointing out understaffing regarding specialist work with children is crucial.

Due to lacking or insufficient resources, on some days the existing workload can just be dealt with, but not much more. Without sufficient staff, safety planning or risk assessments are not always possible. Questionnaires to go through with children for safety planning are also often missing. Due to scarce resources, it may not be possible to offer satisfactory post-care after staying at a women's shelter.

Scarce resources also lead to children's rights and needs not being recognised enough or advocated for with statutory services and at an administrative level. This is because information about the violent situation is either insufficient or needs to be better connected between agencies: e.g. situation regarding rights of custody, the father's conduct with the child welfare office or the relationship between mother and father during criminal proceedings.

The quality of the work that SafeShelters provide must be visible. Shelters that follow Child Safeguarding standards need a certification mark. Additionally, staff members that participate in trainings about Child Safeguarding will get a certificate.

Who is the SafeShelter Guide for?

The SafeShelter Guide has been developed to assist staff in women's shelters who offer (crisis) care to female victims of gender-based violence and their children. The Guide is aimed at these professionals and the collaborating services and agencies they work with, who are committed to keeping children in and out of shelters safe and to protect them from all forms of violence. Key professionals include youth welfare office, family court teams, police officers and those working in the judicial system.

Purpose of the SafeShelter Guide

This is a reference document that readers can use when they need guidance on various aspects of Child Safeguarding in women's shelters, with the best interests of the child as the focus. The guide serves as a well-founded basis for child protection and safeguarding in women's shelters and staff can use it to support with developing and using their Child Safeguarding Policy to improve the wellbeing of children in their care. This is best practice in all shelters. This guide also serves as the basis for the SafeShelter training and workshops on Child Safeguarding.

The Guide is divided into different sections based on the topics discussed so readers can directly go to specific sections that are relevant. It is drafted in a way that its provisions apply equally to protecting girls, boys and non-binary children who may experience or witness any form of violence and thus need support.

Key terms and facts

Child: For the purposes of this guide, the definition of a child based on Article 1 of the United Nations Child Rights Convention is any person below the age of eighteen years. Children are independent legal entities and can independently exercise the rights to which they are entitled.

Child Protection: In the international context, this term describes the general work regarding the establishment and implementation of laws, strategies and systems that serve children's safety in a specific country, in their family and community. **Child Safeguarding** includes both preventive actions to minimise the risks of violence occurring and responsive actions to ensure that incidents which may happen are appropriately handled. This includes proactive measures that are put in place to ensure children residing in the shelter are safe. It is important to distinguish between Child Safeguarding and Child Protection, as often these terms are used to cover both areas and can be misleading.

Child Safeguarding aims to provide children with a place to **grow up in safety**. On the one hand, this includes ensuring external safety, meaning protection from violence, discrimination and neglect. On the other hand, it includes providing internal safety, which encompasses aspects such as autonomy, the ability to form relationship bonds, orientation, trust and power of judgement. Through considering these basic needs, children can develop their personality and self during their time in a women's shelter. Child Safeguarding is a **systematic approach** that is committed to these goals of prevention, protecting children from violence and promoting their best interests. It includes different measures of organisation, protection concepts, monitoring, team organising, qualifications and supervision for staff members, cooperation with third parties. Measures taken can be preventative to reduce risks of violence, but they also ensure that identified cases are handled accordingly.

Violence against children: all forms of violence against persons under 18 years of age perpetrated by parents or other caregivers, peers or strangers. It can include physical, sexualised and emotional violence and neglect, as well as witnessing violence. Children temporarily living in shelters are often victims of gender-based violence within domestic or family violence.

Facts on violence to children from the WHO Global status report on preventing violence against children 2020:

- 1 out of 2 children between the ages of 2 and 17 years suffers some form of violence each year world-wide, resulting in deaths, disabilities and trauma.

- 1 in 4 children under 5 years of age worldwide lives with a mother who is a victim of intimate partner violence.

- Violence against children has many acute and long-term consequences: increased risk of mental illness and anxiety disorders, high-risk behaviors, chronic diseases and social problems including problems in school and risk of being involved in acts of violence and crime.

The **Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention)** calls for measures protecting women and children from all forms of violence, in particular domestic violence of all forms of expression, to be implemented and observed by all authorities.

- **Articles 22 and 26** call for specialised support for children in shelters based on their needs, including age-appropriate psycho-social counselling and respect for the best interests of the child.

- **Article 23** calls for all Member States to take the necessary legislative or other measures to provide for the setting-up of appropriate, easily accessible shelters in sufficient numbers to provide safe accommodation for and to reach out pro-actively to victims, especially women and their children.

- **Article 31** calls for Parties to take the necessary legislative or other measures to ensure that the exercise of any visitation or custody rights does not jeopardise the rights and safety of the victim or children.

Supportive role of shelter staff towards children

Shelter staff are able to play a crucial role in keeping children and their mothers residing in shelters safe as well as providing a feeling of safety for girls, boys and non-binary children.

"I give training to children and mothers focusing on different topics, for example what living in a violent relationship means; how to deal with fear/ stress; how to feel happy and how to build hope. I see what all these training programmes are doing with mothers and children in a positive way. I see the positive change and progress they make. That's so immensely rewarding!"
— Women's shelter staff

The concept of safety in women's shelters refers to:

- The safety of women and their children but also of staff and other residents of the shelter

- Children can be bystanders (witnesses) of violence against others and/or direct victims of violence themselves; at the same time however, they can also be perpetrators of violence against other residents, children or shelter staff

- A distinction between internal and external safety: external safety is more likely to be achieved through "hard" measures such as an anonymous or secret women's shelter address, camera surveillance, fences and child protection guidelines; internal safety is more likely achieved through "soft" measures such as staff providing a sense of safety, good interactions between children, mothers and women's staff, providing resources to improve feelings of safety and well-being and support for mothers to be able to care for their children safely

- The best interests of the child are always the starting point and focus, even if this is at odds with the wishes of the child's caregivers

Shelter staff have the knowledge and skills to:

- Provide children with a high level of external physical safety and internal feeling of safety
- Understand how safety risks to children can be from their father, mother, relative, friend or a professional of other institutions (School, youth welfare, etc.)
- Understand the effects of violence / trauma for children and their relationships with mothers and fathers and how to help them overcome/reduce these effects
- Provide educational, preventative and interventional measures aimed at keeping children safe
- Support mothers to improve the safety and protection of their children

Child Safeguarding in a women's shelter

The safety and wellbeing of children in women's shelters is a priority. Appropriate measures are taken to ensure that shelter staff, residing women and their children, third parties, cooperation partners, projects and programmes do not harm children in any way, so that they are protected from violence and their wellbeing is promoted. Potential harm to each child must be assessed and considered through transparent practices. Further, *Child Safeguarding* aims to promote children's resilience in situations of risk or violence, which includes danger coming from the perpetrator/father or the family, danger from the mother or other women and children at the shelter and danger from the actions of shelter staff. It also includes contact with youth welfare, situations in kindergartens and schools, medical care facilities and so on. Practices of risk assessment as well as responses to risks have to be monitored continuously in order to revise whether children receive appropriate support and their safety is truly being improved.

Learning objectives of the Guide

After reading the guide and participating in the related trainings, participants should be able to:

- describe what *Child Safeguarding* is and define the role of women's shelters

- define risks to keeping children safe in shelters, know how to monitor and log them, and measures to reduce these risks

- plan risk-reducing measures, know how to enact them and evaluate their effectiveness

- understand the usefulness of Child Safeguarding Policies for shelters and necessary components of a policy

Part II. Child Safeguarding in women's shelters: guiding principles, topics, expertise and recommendations

Why focus on Child Safeguarding in shelters?

Child Safeguarding aims to protect children from violence and promote their best interest. It also refers to strengthening children's resilience in the face of risky or violent situations.

The figure on the right shows the different ways staff ensure the safeguarding of children: by being aware, by preventing any safety risks from occurring, by responding to any risks that do occur and by reporting incidents in order to provide the best possible care and to understand how to prevent the incident from happening again.

Child Safeguarding has four main parts, that, when put in place together, create a child safe organisation:
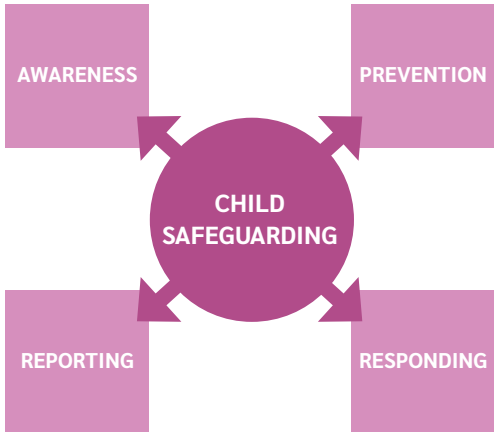
Source: Oxfam Australia Child Safeguarding Toolkit – A Practical Guide to support the implementation of the Oxfam Australia Child Safeguarding Policy

Two guiding principles of Child Safeguarding

Principle 1: Protect children from all forms of violence

- All children have equal rights to protection from violence, irrespective of their age, ethnicity, gender, religion or sexuality.

- Every staff member has a responsibility to support the protection of children.

- Women's shelters have a duty of care to children with whom they work, are in contact with, or who are affected by their work and operations.

- Shelters have a responsibility to help their partners meet the minimum requirements on child protection and to strive to achieve best practice.

- All actions on Child Safeguarding are taken in the best interests of the child, which are paramount.

Principle 2: Respect children's rights

- Respect the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (Article 19, para. 1) for Parties to take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child. This includes the promotion of its four core principles:
    - ✔ non-discrimination;
    - ✔ the best interest of the child;
    - ✔ the right to life, survival and development;
    - ✔ and respect for the views of the child.

This translates into treating all children as individuals and according to their unique needs and identities, no matter their origin, appearance, gender or convictions. Shelter staff working with children show respect for the child and the child- like perspective; they listen to children attentively and treat their statements, as well as their version of events, with due respect; they use non-judgmental language, no labels and express themselves in a way adapted to the child's level of development.

Shelter staff also create within the shelter a culture of openness, responsibility and mutual respect, facilitating discussion of numerous topics and issues regarding child safety.

Some aspects of Child Safeguarding in women's shelters

Endangerment through the child's father / violent ex-partner of the mother

When arriving at the shelter, the relief of being safe from violent situations can clash with a growing fear of the father's reaction. In most cases, children do not have the option to choose whether they flee with their mother or not. They have no agency over the situation.

Fathers often try to contact their children through their phones or other social media. This way they try to threaten, manipulate and instrumentalise them.

Problems intensify when fathers try to enter the women's shelter or approach children when they are out of the shelter. Repeatedly violent (ex-) partners can and do harass their victims by standing in front of the shelter, ringing the bell, patrolling the street or attempting to break into the shelter through garden fences, walls or gates. Another tactic is to approach the child unexpectedly, for example on their way to or from school, at the football field, at day-care. All this causes the children in the shelter fear and panic and limits their sense of

safety and their trust. The child of a violent father may experience these feelings as well, sometimes in addition to wanting or feeling they have to have contact with the father to calm him, have a relationship with him or protect their mother by catering to him. This can objectively increase the risk for the child and/or the mother.

"One time there was an alarm because the father of another child tried to enter the shelter. That really frightened me." — Girl in a women's shelter

When courts issue restraining orders that only apply to the women/mothers, this can be a significant problem in practice. The father is not allowed to approach the mother; however, this is not the case for the children. Dangerous situations may arise during unregulated visitations, where the child might be in physical danger or their emotional safety at risk. Children often feel scared during visits or when they have to keep in contact with their fathers against their will. They are often ambivalent and might not say or do what they want, especially when they feel pressure from their family and relatives or believe they are protecting their mothers.

Fathers might ask the children a question such as: "Where was your mother last night?". These questions put all children in a loyalty conflict where they have to choose between "lying" or "telling the truth". In situations of family violence however, this is a conflict between the child's own safety and the safety of their mother: If they tell the truth, their mother might be at risk. When they do not answer or lie, they might be in danger themselves.

Article 31 of the Istanbul Convention states that actions of violence are considered when deciding over custody rights. In addition, custody and visitation rights must not jeopardise the safety of the victim nor the children.

Concerns of the child regarding their safety and the safety of their mother

Children living in women's shelters report fearing for their mother's safety, especially if the father has tried to enter the women's shelter or has threatened the mother. These fears can stay with the children even after leaving the shelter.

"Even though the dangerous situation is over, and we don't live in the shelter anymore and my father is not really a threat anymore, I am still scared for my mother."

Children also grow fearful when their mother becomes sick or depressed or if there are financial struggles. This shows a deep underlying fear of loss, which can lead to lasting impairments in their ability to form attachments. These fears stem from real experiences the child has had: they lost their home and often their friends, close family and pets. The father is gone and the fear of losing the mother as well is very strong. Many children are traumatised and need trauma-informed care and counselling to help them restore their well-being and inner sense of safety.

Anonymity of women's shelters as a problem for children

The addresses of women's shelters are anonymous, which can be challenging for children.

The father might try to get information about the shelter's location by asking seemingly innocent questions: "Is there a supermarket nearby? Is it next to a park?" Grandparents and other relatives can also pressure children and especially younger ones run the risk of accidentally disclosing an address. When children give the address to someone because they cannot stand the pressure anymore, they often feel very guilty and fearful.

Anonymity in general is hard for the children, because they cannot tell their friends where they live and invite them to their home. This is another factor that negatively affects the children's inner sense of safety.

> *"The school was directly next to the women's shelter, so it was difficult to not be seen when going in and out of there."*

> *"I couldn't invite my new friends, and that was hard."*
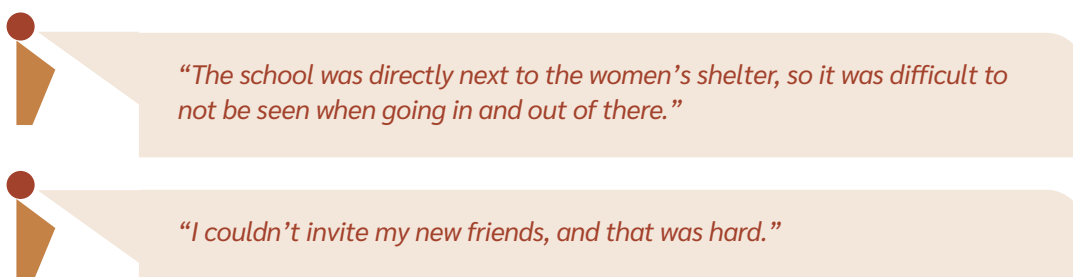
Violence amongst the residents of the women's shelter

Both the interviewed women and the shelter staff reported aggression and violence between children and adult residents, with incidents mostly happening when no shelter staff are present. These include:

- Children who are physically and verbally violent towards one another

- Aggression due to conflicts between the women

- Racist hostilities or prejudice around other protected characteristics

- Physical and psychological abuse/violence from mother against their children

- Physical and psychological abuse/violence from children against their mother, e.g. older children that accuse their mother of trying to destroy the family

- Physical and psychological abuse/violence from another resident of the shelter against their mother

> *"To be honest, for my child it is way too loud and aggressive here – especially the other women"* — Mother of a 4-year-old girl in a women's shelter
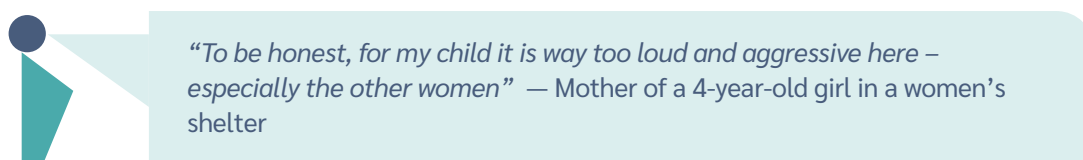
Spatial aspects of external safety

One issue for external safety is the entrance to the women's shelter, even though shelters take many precautions, e.g. locking systems, child safe door opening mechanisms and requests to keep doors always shut. Nevertheless, 100% safety is not achievable: a father or abuser might ring the doorbell and a child opens, or a woman forgets to close the entrance door accordingly and somebody enters unauthorised. Other safety risk are gardens and courtyards without sufficient protection measures (insufficient fencing, unsecured gates or back doors).

> *"I would like for the fences to be higher and to have barbed wire, so that no men can enter."* — 11-year-old boy in a women's shelter
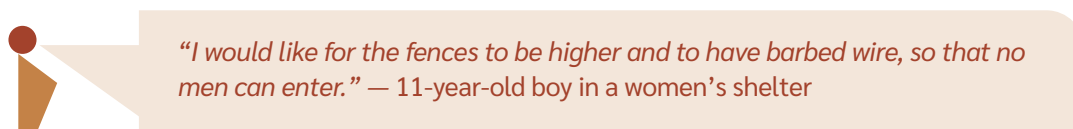
Online-Safety: Internet, mobile phones, social media, and online games

Many children play online games that are not age appropriate. Often mothers are unaware or don't understand the technology and possible risks. Some might even be just relieved that their child is occupied. Staff members try to point out these issues if they become aware.

A common problem is when abusers install stalkerware, monitoring software or other tracking tools on the phones or computers of the children or mothers. Cyberstalking and cyberattacks, together with unwanted contact through social media, pose further safety risks. Video calls with fathers can provide further clues about the location of the shelter. One mother reported a tracking device attached to her car:

> *"My husband was always standing in front of the women's shelter, he always knew where I was. We then discovered that he had mounted a tracking device to my car."* — Mother of a 4-year-old girl in a women's shelter

Previous approaches to dealing with online safety and protection in women's shelters

- Many women's shelters, especially in Austria and Germany, prompt women and children/adolescents to change their SIM-cards and avoid using WIFI networks due to safety concerns.

- Many women's shelters advise women and children/adolescents to turn off geolocation on their smart devices and to not use social media.

- Social workers in women's shelters go through prevention and awareness raising measures with children/adolescents to educate them on how and when to use their smart devices and to talk about cybersecurity in general.

- Social workers also give advice to mothers about filter programmes for children/adolescents on smartphones and tablets and other measures to ensure a safe usage of such devises. An external expert may be invited for this purpose.

- Shelter staff advise the mother to install a single channel for communicating with the father, e.g. a special email address that is solely used for communicating with the father and is checked regularly on a specific time.

- Shelter staff help the children prepare for talking to their father on the phone, e.g. to ensure that the child does not compromise the shelter's location.

- Some women's shelters equip children with a (sometimes digital) "emergency kit" in case they return to their fathers after their stay at the shelter. These include helpful telephone numbers, email addresses, websites, apps, contact persons and some helpful rules of conduct.

Expertise and recommendations from shelter staff for the safety and protection of children and responding to risks in shelters

The most important needs of children in shelters

■ **PROMOTING INNER SAFETY**

Shelter professionals from the different countries involved in the SafeShelter project agreed that the priority need of children at the shelters **is the feeling and knowledge that they are safe**, because they have just lost their home, which is, in itself, a very stressful situation.

> *The children first need a safe place as a shelter. Then it is important that they are seen with their own needs."* — Women's shelter staff

Another important need when arriving at the shelter is that of information, given that many children do not get any adequate explanation of what has happened and where they are now and why. Depending on their age, children might know that they are in a "shelter" but often the term is very abstract for them, without concrete meaning. The children, depending on their age, need transparency and a clear explanation of the situation which ideally should be given by the mother. However, often mothers are overwhelmed, struggle to find adequate wording and need help with an age-appropriate explanation. To find an explanation for the child, it is helpful to clarify with the mother what she was able to explain and ask the children if they know why they are there and what their emotional state is (e.g. their hopes, worries and fears, how they are dealing with the situation). A three-way meeting between the mother, children and a member of shelter staff can be very helpful.

> *"Somebody is really listening to me, to what I have to say and is interested in how I feel, wow!"* — Child in a women's shelter speaking about interaction with shelter staff

Consequently, children need time to adjust to the new situation, to calm down and settle in as peacefully as possible.

Children need to be shown the new environment of the shelter and its rooms and rules, often a new city, the new school and so on. They need to get used to many new people. Possible changes in mood that the child may experience due to these changes should be explored with the mothers who sometimes have the perception that children were quieter at home and seem "more difficult" now. Support groups for mothers are one way of conveying some knowledge about the psychological strain children might endure and age-appropriate behaviour. Additionally, women can support and mentor one another in their role as mothers.

Shelter staff find ways to facilitate safety experiences for children arriving at shelters using different techniques and perspectives: narratives, psycho-corporal methods (calm breathing, body and autonomic nervous system), stories, art-therapy, etc. These tools help children to settle into the shelter and have a positive experience.

Shelter staff try to help the children with processing their experiences of violence, especially by reassuring them that it was not their fault and that they are not responsible for what is happening. Some children may exhibit violent behaviour themselves as a response to experiences of violence or as a form of protection. While it is important to underline and affirm that any form of violence is wrong, this should be considered.

Child Safeguarding also requires awareness that **all** professionals in the shelter participate in the co-creation of a space for emotional co-regulation and for stability. These are basic needs for children in shelters. Stability refers to temporal stability (possibility of a longer-term stay), stable structures (day-plan, routines and rituals, clear rules) and stable relationships with caregivers/staff.

Regarding the latter there is a clear consensus that **children benefit from having a member of shelter staff assigned to them on an individual basis**; someone who is there for them, listens to them and looks after their wellbeing.

■ **CHILDCARE AND SCHOOL**

Children have a right to education! They need help with their education and development, whether it be helping with their homework or speech therapy. While cooperation with childcare, kindergartens, schools and training centres is work-intensive, it is necessary to facilitate the best educational possibilities. This usually entails shelter staff informing the childcare facilities and schools about the possible effects of violence, aspects of security and concrete risks. The violence that children have suffered often impacts their academic performance and some might fall behind. This in turn can stunt their self-esteem and emotional and intellectual stability.

■ **CONTACT WITH PEERS**

A highly important need for practically all children is, of course, that of social contact with peers, both inside the shelter with others who have had similar experiences (of violence) as them, and outside the shelter, with friends and classmates. From the child's perspective, the anonymity of the shelter can be conflicting, if it requires a visiting ban: protection from their (mother's) abuser might clash with their wish for inner safety, bonds, relationships of their own choice and a sense of normality.

■ **CONFLICTING RELATIONSHIP WITH THE FATHER/ABUSER**

For some children who worry about their father there is a need for support in dealing with these concerns and to find a more or less comfortable position towards him. While they see that their mother is safe, they might worry about their father, especially if the police intervened, if the father went into custody or if they left without saying goodbye to him, etc. They may also worry about having to have contact with and see their father again. Dealing with the ambivalent feelings of the child and the possibly conflicting safety needs of the mother and the child call for a differentiated understanding of "safety" and "danger/risk" and a high reflection competence of the team.

"What's needed for the children? Strengthening, strengthening, strengthening!"
— Women's shelter staff

Recommendations for contact with fathers

Shelter staff have developed a series of strategies to protect children, such as developing self-protection skills, learning to set limits, asking for help, suggesting spaces for exchange with the father. Some shelters assign a specific staff person for each mother and her children, and house meetings are held for women to discuss safety issues at the shelter. Some shelter staff proactively ask about safety issues in individual conversations or informal groups at the shelter, while others offer workshops on safety issues with trainers from outside the shelter, e.g. conflict resolution, non-violent communication and self-defence.

"As we can't do much more for these children in relation to visitations with the fathers, we are very active at a legal level. We gather all the possible evidence where we see that there are offences committed against the children when they go on leave with their fathers and then we present them to the courts, either for visits to take place at a meeting point or for them not to have overnight stays, which for us is already an achievement".
— Women's shelter staff

Strategies for the protection and safety of children in women's shelters

The staff of women's shelters have developed a range of strategies to ensure the safety of children.

- Children are taught how to develop skills for their own safety, e.g. through self-protection and assertiveness.

- Supportive talks with children and mothers are also important. Shelter staff from France reported that they prepare support cards for children's visitations with their fathers with details of who to call if they feel unsafe (usually the mother, the educator and the police).

- Questions regarding safety/security are talked about in meetings of the residing women/mothers (sometimes even in meetings dedicated especially to children residing in the shelter).

- Some staff members proactively ask about risk and safety problems in one-on-one conversations, while others offer workshops on these issues or invite external experts (e.g. on the topics of dealing with conflicts, non-violent communication or self-protection/self-assertion).

- Women's shelters suggest working in partnership with youth welfare offices to install designated rooms for visitation with the father. Some shelters assign a staff member to each woman and her children that will prepare visitations with them.

- If there is reason to believe that the child might be at risk, shelter staff try to obtain a suspension of visitation rights or advocate for supervised visitations.

- Ongoing cooperation with the institutions and persons involved in the procedure of visitation is essential. In one of the shelters, staff collect "problematic issues" about the perpetrator to present them to the courts.

Obtaining external support for children

Women's shelter staff often feel a sense of overarching responsibility, something that might also be ascribed to them externally. However, children can also benefit from external professionals:

- One staff member reported on a programme about dealing with the effects of violence with a specialised child therapeutic framework; this entailed single or group therapy with a focus on the observation and expression of feelings.

"Considering all that needs to be done every day, I don't think the mothers have the capacity to work on their relationship with their child and their regeneration, because they feel very sad/they are not feeling well and on top of that they have to care for their children."

- External psychological care or psychotherapy can be helpful with a variety of issues, including: bedwetting, attachment difficulties, low frustration tolerance and aggressive behaviour, eating disorders, self-harm, PTSD. However, access to these services can be difficult during a stay in a shelter and sometimes impossible.

"We had cases where adolescent victims of sexual abuse had to wait for a year to get access to an external psychological service that we had referred them to because we don't have children and adolescent therapists in our shelter."

- As a response, some women's shelters cooperate with therapists, child psychiatrists and/or doctors in order to at least facilitate timely diagnostics and to develop strategies for support.

Recommendations for age-appropriate psychological care for children

The work on the **identification and regulation of emotions** is essential. This involves providing specialised services that are age-appropriate and tailored to the child.

When working with children in shelters, psychological care entails:

- Giving the child time to talk and for the professional to have time to understand the situation from the child's perspective;

- Creating one-on-one opportunities for the child to disclose about the violence they are experiencing or witnessing themselves;

- Emphasizing that the violence is not the child's fault and ensure the child understands it is not their responsibility to protect their mother, whilst validating the child's concern and any action they may have taken to protect their mother;

- Checking with the child whether they know what to do to keep safe and have a network of adults who they trust. If not, work on this with them or ensure that any work done with the child by other practitioners includes safety planning;

- Recognizing that children will have developed their own coping strategies to deal with the impact of violence and abuse;

- Never promising complete confidentiality – explain responsibilities towards keeping children and their mothers safe;

- Always keeping the child informed of what is happening, with age-appropriate information;

- Giving the message that the child can come back to you again;

- Psychotherapy or psychological support for specific issues (e.g. bedwetting, difficulty in bonding, low tolerance to frustration and aggressive behaviour, eating disorders, self-harming behaviour).

Recommendations for professional support of children in women's shelter – healing from trauma and violence and fostering internal safety

The strengthening of children in shelters works towards the following goals:

- ✔ **Emotional self-regulation**
- ✔ **Frustration tolerance**
- ✔ **Attachment and trust**
- ✔ **Communication competence**
- ✔ **Self-worth**
- ✔ **Power of judgement**

To achieve these goals, every child needs attention, care and age-appropriate services for their personal development, which means shelter staff members have to invest time that needs to be available. The fostering of internal safety therefore depends on resources that must be provided by the institution of women's shelters. Whether these resources are taken from the time budgeted for the shelter staff or whether external services are consulted is a question that needs to be included in the general concept of the women's shelter. The question is not if children's inner safety is supported but rather what the support might look like. When developing a SafeShelter concept, first the various areas should be evaluated regarding need for improvement. Following this, the shelter develops strategies and methods for each area (ideally with participation of the mother) and then implements them tailored to the individual child. The children are at all times subjects of the events and not objects of a pedagogical or psycho-social intervention. Acknowledgement, sensitivity regarding gender and culture, acceptance and reliability are crucial parameters for the professional attitude of all shelter staff during interactions with children (and other residents).

For the psycho-social support of children, it is essential to help them feel their emotions and regulate affective reactions through age-appropriate and individually tailored methods and services (**see our traffic light system on page 29**).

Good practice example of an interaction between a shelter staff and a child

Shelter staff: Do you feel tension in your throat, in your belly, in your neck? Is it associated with an emotion – especially sadness, anger, fear and so on?

For example, if the child then talks about fear, the shelter staff says: show me the size of the fear with plasticine. So, they make a representation of their fear in plasticine. Does fear have this size all the time? Is it sometimes bigger or smaller? The staff member then sees how the emotion varies in intensity depending on the situations in which the child finds themselves. The staff member can also ask the child to show an emotion physically. Some children will not show emotion when there is a protection issue, that is, they don't want to hurt their mother or upset their father.

Different emotions are worked on at all ages, including: fear, anger, sadness, shame or joy. Some children are in post-traumatic stress, which cuts them off from their emotions. A staff member can measure progress when children are able to identify their emotions or express them without harming themselves or others. Some children tend to manage anger by being violent. A shelter staff member can explain that there are differences between anger and violence and can offer other ways of regulating emotions, such as sports, gardening, creativity or therapy with animals.

Different materials and tools are used to work on safety and emotions with children residing in shelters, tools that allow them to express their emotions correctly and to welcome them. This can include educational toys but also self-made tools like "reassuring charms" such as beads, magnets, protective bracelets, for example a fabric bracelet – it is a bracelet that they always keep on them and which means "I am no longer alone". Some children report that they feel very lonely because they are no longer able to help their mother or their siblings against the violence. Shelter staff can give them a sense of security.

Good practice example of a framework of standards for children in women's shelters (The Netherlands)

The framework of standards for children in care in women's shelters in the Netherlands consists of a set of four specific indicators with corresponding standards for children. These standards describe a minimum set of requirements for all women's shelters in the country. The starting point for these indicators is a commitment by women's shelters to contribute to the high-quality care for children in shelters. Here the four indicators are highlighted.

Indicator 1: Establish and ensure immediate safety of the child

The main objective of the shelter is to offer a safe environment. Safety is therefore primary; work on recovery can only take place once safety has been achieved. For this reason, the purpose of this first indicator is to determine whether shelters are objectively and uniformly assessing the safety of the children involved using some form of a risk assessment tool. Various tools are used in the sector to determine whether the woman and her children need to stay at a shelter outside their region for safety reasons. The most frequently used instrument in the Netherlands is Verwey Jonker's risk assessment tool, available in Dutch only, sometimes used partially and/or supplemented with shelter specific questions.

Indicator 2: Ensuring risk-based care

Once immediate safety is achieved, work can begin on long-term safety. The purpose of this indicator is to determine whether shelters work on stable safety by means of risk-based care. In risk-based care, care workers use a care plan based on the risk factors that maintain insecurity. This maps out triggers that lead to violence, as well as making agreements on how to prevent such situations from occurring. Risk-based care is the basis of any assistance process and work towards full recovery.

Indicator 3: Ensuring recovery and future-oriented care

The purpose of this indicator is to determine how shelters work on the sustainable development and recovery of the child, so that they are equipped for the future after being admitted to the shelter and settling in. Recovery and future oriented care include trauma treatment where necessary, working on the social emotional development of the child, as well as ensuring normalisation in the living situation and thus picking up health and safe life. This indicator is focused on the future. The best interests of the child are always the starting point, even if this is at odds with the wishes of the child's father and/or mother.

Indicator 4: Cooperation in the child care chain

With this indicator, the shelter shows that there are agreements with external organizations to ensure the safety and recovery of the child beyond the shelter stay.

For more information read the full report with standards for each indicator (Dutch language only): **Eindrapport Ontwikkeling Normenkader 'Kinderen in de opvang' vrouwenopvang en maatschappelijke opvang** (Final Report Development of standards Framework for children in care of women's shelter and social care, 2019).

Children's and mother's recommendations for increasing child wellbeing in shelters

"The Istanbul Convention not only recognises children as victims of violence, it also entrusts them with great responsibility as agents of change. Today's girls are tomorrow's women just as today's boys are tomorrow's men. Attitudes, convictions and behavioural patterns are shaped very early on in life. To break the continuity of gender-based violence, the Istanbul Convention places great emphasis on the importance of changing mentalities, attitudes and gender relations. It therefore requires states parties to teach children the concept of equality between women and men, non-stereotyped gender roles and non-violent conflict resolution in interpersonal relationships (Article 14). Building gender relations on mutual respect and recognition rather than dominance and control is the best way to prevent gender-based violence."

Source: Council of Europe. Children's rights (Istanbul Convention): safe from fear, safe from violence, 2019.

The SafeShelter project interviewed children and women residing in shelters in 6 different EU countries (Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Spain and the Netherlands) to improve understanding of how they experienced life in the shelter and perceptions of safety, including interactions in the shelter.

Feedback from children about safeguarding in shelters

- Most children interviewed in the SafeShelter project would appreciate more attention and talking about their situation, especially those over 12 years old. And although most of the children said that staff asked about their wellbeing often enough, some would like to be asked more often. This shows that children have different needs when residing in shelters, which should be taken into account and addressed on an individual basis.

Other suggestions included:

- To organise meetings and activities under the guidance of a counsellor, according to age, for children and teenagers in the shelter.

> *"Organised meetings for children and young people would have been great. Meetings with each other were only on their own initiative."*

> *"We could do more activities together, but according to age because sometimes activities can't be done all together, there are things that I don't feel like doing as if I were a child because I'm an adolescent."*

- More psychological and therapeutic offers (specialised child and youth psychologist).

> *"I would have liked to do therapy, but that was not possible."*

- More free time and creative offers, including outside activities and excursions.

> *"It would have been nice to be able to do something artistic, but unfortunately that wasn't possible."*

- To allow pets in the shelter.
- More focus on older children/teenagers: books, films, plays for older children at the shelter, more (outside) activities offered for them, more „special time" to talk to staff, a room where they can chat, talk, read or play alone or with one another, without smaller children or adults present.
- To have male workers in the shelter.

> *"It's all very good, but it would be nice if there were men in the house too, not always just women."*

> *"The male recreational pedagogue should be there much more often."*

- To have more time with the supervisor or contact worker/to have more resources available by staff working with children.

> *"More time just for me, with my supervisor."*

- Contact with male family members who were not showing any violent behaviour.

> *"As a child, I didn't understand at all why my grandfather and uncle weren't allowed to visit. That made me even more afraid of men, because they were men with whom I got along very well. Why weren't they welcome here? Were they bad, too? I desperately needed someone to explain all this to me."*

- More physical and mental distance from close family within the shelter.

> *"Distance from the mother and siblings would have been so important."*

- Clear communication and explanation of the situation to the children.

> *"Clarity would have been so important for me. Suddenly everything was different, and I didn't know where we were. My mother was so burdened, I didn't want to burden her with my things."*

- Permission to decorate the rooms.

> *"We would like them to let us decorate the rooms because it makes it feel more like our own, like we are at home."*

- More activities just for mothers to encourage integration.

> *"I think our mothers should do activities together so that they get along better with each other."*

Feedback from mothers residing in shelters with their children about Child Safeguarding

- The shelter should provide rooms for families who want/need to be in separate dormitories as well as for those who need to be in the same room, especially those with younger children or children with eating disorders. These options are especially important for longer stays.
- Some women wish for a friendlier and brighter design of the rooms, also decorated by the children themselves.
- Gardens are seen as very important, however, very good security measures are needed.
- Child and adolescent psychologist specialised in gender-based violence.
- Different therapeutic and recreational offers for children such as sensual perception as a way of helping with depressive moods, body therapy, dance classes, movement, artistic expression and yoga.
- Activities inside and outside during school holidays and during the weekend are wanted too.

- Improving security measures for the journey to school and times spent outside the shelter.

- **Group activities** should take into account the age of the children, as most activities are planned for children between 8 and 12 years old. These activities could be pottery, group games, playground activities, water activities in the summer, maybe putting a pool in the playground for the youngest children, storytelling. Also, there should be specific activities for teenagers.

- **Organised meetings** for the children in the house.

- Shelter staff should aspire to strengthen mothers in their abilities to care for the children and manage the household – some mothers think that sometimes **a bit more regulation and control** might be needed.

- **Translators.** Some of the migrant mothers are not fluent in the local language and do not have an interpreter/translator at the shelter, which makes it difficult for them to communicate. Although they have access to this service, they would like to have it more frequently and more easily.

> *"As a Pakistani woman, I have problems with the language and before it was very difficult for me to be understood, now I speak a little better, but I would have preferred to have a translator in the shelter."*

- **Educational support** or help with homework is another need that is insufficiently met in many shelters and would require funding to pay for private **tuition** for school children or a tutor who comes to the shelter to supervise and support children with schoolwork.

- Another suggestion for improvement included having a **paediatrician** come to the shelter at least twice a week to help avoid often multiple trips to take children to the outpatient paediatric unit and the related challenges for the children and staff and transport costs.

- **Babysitting services.** To have professionals working in the home who are dedicated to the care of children, especially so that mothers can have their own space and time alone as women who are affected by violence. Likewise, to allow them greater autonomy at work and not have to miss out on job offers because they do not have support networks to take care of their children.

- **Housing assistance.** For many women financial assistance or access to public housing is necessary to support them to leave the shelter. Some feel that they spend too much time in the shelter but when it is time for them to leave, they struggle to find an apartment. They often cannot access housing due to their (precarious) working contracts or their low income, so they end up being excluded from the rental application process.

> *"It is a wheel that is very difficult to get out of because we came here to protect ourselves from the violence we have experienced, but then we don't have many options for work, the jobs we usually get are on not official and we don't have a contract, so when we go to rent a flat we are not candidates because we don't have a salary or because the salary is not enough or because we are in an irregular situation; I think they should help us to get out of here because we don't want to stay in these shelters all our lives either."*

- **Follow-up.** Having a social worker follow up on each mother's case. Some of the mothers complained about staying a long time in the home, while other mothers who were admitted after them had access to flats in less time. They explained that this made them angry and uncertain, and in this sense, they asked that the person doing the follow-up should explain the exclusion criteria for living in a flat. Some of the mothers underline follow-up care as an important need that often cannot be fulfilled due to insufficient resources.

> *"I think it is important for someone from outside to come and talk to us and explain why some of us don't have a flat and remain in the shelter and others who arrive later do go to a flat. When they come they should bring a translator because sometimes we don't understand everything; you are the first one to come from outside to ask me how I am doing in this house."*

- **Psychotherapeutic spaces for mothers.** To have therapeutic spaces to address issues of motherhood for a woman who has been a victim of violence and the recovery of the mother-child bond.

> *"Sometimes I feel that we don't have space for ourselves alone, we always have to be with our children and I understand that, but I need a moment with myself and I can't have that in this house."*

- **Internet connection.** Extend the range of the WIFI, as it only covers a small part of the house. Due to children tend to be in the staircase area (= place with the best connection) looking at their mobile devices to do their homework or scroll through social media.

> *"The WIFI is something that is important to look at because nowadays everything is on the internet and in this house the WIFI does not reach us in the bedrooms, where there is more coverage is on the ground floor and that is why they are all there on the stairs looking at their mobile or doing their homework; I am organising WIFI for me and my children, but it is something that the house should improve."*

- **Common space.** Women want a comfortable space for residents to spend time together, e.g. with a large TV in the common area to watch movies together and a large sofa where several people can sit.

- **Avoiding multiple changes of shelters within the circuit.** Mothers in a Spanish shelter pointed out that they were first admitted to a boarding house where they shared spaces with different people, then after a few weeks they were admitted to an emergency shelter and after some time they moved to the house where they are now. They explained how these constant changes with (for them) seemingly no justified reasons other than that "the circuit works like this" not only affected them in terms of relationships, but also their children who had to "break up with their friends to have to make other friends and without being sure how long they would be in the new house". The changes also affected schooling, sometimes the children had to change schools because the new shelter was in another neighbourhood or region.

> *"I worry about having to move from one house to another because in the end I feel that when I am making progress, I have to go somewhere else and my child also has to readapt, this does not help us to recover. Does it work like this in all of Spain?"*

- **Cultural sensitivity.** The intercultural factor has been relevant and should be considered more, not only because of the number of migrant mothers residing in the shelter but also because there are very few professionals with migrant backgrounds working in these centres.

"There is no one who looks like me, it is difficult for them to understand my culture and my food."

Examples of good practice in Austria

Meetings of staff members of the children's area of the Austrian Women's Shelter Network: all staff members of the Austrian Women's Shelter Network working directly with children meet every 1,5 years. The objective of these 2-day-long in-person meetings is the exchange of knowledge and advanced training. Additionally, online meetings take place every six months, starting in March 2021.

Pets in women's shelters: several Austrian women's shelters allow residents to keep small pets. This is important for women, including those at high risk, who cannot leave their pet behind.

Male adolescents in women's shelters: in Tyrol as well as Burgenland, women's shelters have 1-2 apartments that have their own kitchen and bathrooms facilities. These can be used by (male) adolescents, which allows them and the women/mothers to have their own space. This has shown to be very important for the shelter residents.

Necessary infrastructure for Child Safeguarding in shelters

The interviews with shelter staff highlighted a number of aspects of the infrastructure that are necessary to provide protection and safety for children in shelters. These include political and structural issues that actually go far beyond what women's shelters themselves can do on the ground. Nevertheless, women's shelter workers and especially the regional and national women's shelter networks have to deal with this constantly. As a result, they face considerable challenges.

According to most of the shelter staff interviewed, many of the children's needs cannot be sufficiently met in most shelters, mainly due to **limitations in resources, space and staff**. Most interviewees relate these shortages to the fact that the human and financial resources for the work with children in shelters are still less than those for the work with women in many countries, which is seen as a political and structural problem of not giving children the same status of victims/survivors as women.

A way of managing this is to implement a traffic light system, consisting of the stages **minimum/normal-okay/ideal,** because sometimes it is simply impossible to provide care at the desired standard.

The traffic light system shows organisations and shelters where they stand in their efforts to address and improve child safety and protection.

We take into account two different perspectives. On the one hand, there are the available resources, on the other hand, there is the child and the needs and wants they have. How can those be addressed?

1. Safe admission to the shelter

- **MINIMUM**
    - A space in a shelter is organised. If this is impossible due to insufficient capacity in the respective shelter, a workable and adequate solution must be found. The admission should be carried out by a competent and professional staff member.
    - In women's shelters that are not staffed 24/7 due to lack of resources, even meeting this minimum standard can be a challenge.

- **OKAY/NORMAL**
    - A competent and professional staff member decides about the admission of the woman and her children (during daytime, night-time and weekends).

- A staff member from the children's team welcomes the child (depending on their age the mother may be present) and helps them to familiarise themself with the house rules. It needs to be clarified whether the child shows physical injuries and needs medical care.

- During admission (at a consultation centre or a shelter) the needs of the women as well as the children are assessed. Risk Assessment is also a part of admission; shelter staff can use the checklist for safety and risk management (see **Annex 1, page 40**).

- Boards displaying the name and a photograph of all shelter staff members and their area of responsibility help children with orientation in the shelter.

- **IDEAL**

  - It is important to prepare the child for their stay at the women's shelter, e.g. for the changes that might await them. This ensures the child can adapt to the new situation and it gives them a sense of safety.

  - During admission there is time for the child to talk, to express themself, as well as time for the contact worker to understand the child's perspective.

  - In addition to an information board, the supervisor or contact worker introduces each staff member personally and explains their activities and responsible areas. Meanwhile, it is communicated to the child that they can always talk to any of the staff and that they and their fears/worries will be taken seriously.

  - Up until now, women's shelters in Germany and Austria do not usually conduct a risk assessment for the child specifically and rather include it with the mother's assessment. This should change.

2. Risk-sensitive stabilisation

- **MINIMUM**

  - The child has access to a safe place to retreat within the shelter (like a "safe haven"). Shelter staff try to prevent all forms of violence.

- **OKAY/NORMAL**

  - It is made very clear that the child has no fault in the violent behaviour of the adults and that it was and is not their responsibility to protect their mother. At the same time, the contact worker and all staff members validate the child's fears and worries, as well as their efforts to try and protect their mother.

  - It is important to acknowledge the coping strategies the child has developed for dealing with violence and abuse (and their effects).

  - Never promise complete confidentiality! Instead, shelter workers should explain that sometimes it is necessary to break confidentiality to ensure the safety of mothers and children.

- **IDEAL**

  - Opportunities for one-on-one contact with all children are scheduled regularly. The goal is to recognise danger to self and others through continuous risk and resource assessments with clearly defined procedures. Individual coping strategies should be identified and self-empowering aspects fostered.

  - Whenever possible, children should receive age-appropriate information about what is happening.

  - With teenagers, workers can discuss their attitudes towards friendship and relationships and how they think about domestic violence. It might be useful to explain that domestic violence is a crime and that nobody has the right to abuse another person.

  - The contact worker advocates for the child's interests, which are seen as equally important to the mother's interests. All parties involved are aware that the mother's interests do not automatically match the child's interests.

3. Recovery and empowerment

- **MINIMUM**
  - Shelter staff ensure that the child knows that they are safe, both physically and emotionally.

- **OKAY/NORMAL**
  - Qualified staff are available and there are special rooms for working with children.
  - Apps and games to support the (internal) safety and well-being of the children are included in the pedagogical work.

- **IDEAL**
  - The child can always contact a specialised staff member and talk about whatever might affect them. The children and teenagers are seen as their own person. Specially trained professionals work with them, whose job it is to advocate for them and strengthen them in maintaining their rights.
  - Another important issue is working with the mothers regarding the needs of their children. Ideally, the child's contact worker also works with the mother on her own to help the often heavily strained women understand their child's perspective and sensitise them to the needs of their children. Contact workers can also direct group work with the mother, which is helpful for recognising problems and fears the children might have.
  - Together with the child, staff members review whether the child knows what they can do to protect themselves and whether they have a support system of adults who they trust and can speak to. Should this not be the case, children are helped in building a support system.
  - Recognised body-based practices for trauma work (e.g. from EMDR therapy) are included and introduced through play.
  - Children understand that they can always come back (to the contact worker) if they want to.
  - Children are supported to understand (in age-appropriate ways) the risks and usage of social media and digital services.

4. Moving out of the shelter

- **MINIMUM**
  - The child has the telephone number of the shelter and knows that they can always go there for help. Information materials, flyers, contact lists/telephone numbers, email addresses and online contacts are handed out, so that children know where to turn for support.

- **OKAY/NORMAL**
  - A safety plan for the move-out is in place.
  - The children/adolescents are shown how to use apps or websites with helpful services.
  - A secure income for the mother is ensured and safe housing is organised.
  - Childcare and education are organised (kindergarten, school, etc.).
  - When the risk assessments show a high risk and danger for the child, the mother is informed that the youth welfare office will be notified. This is for the safety and protection of the children/adolescents and is meant as assistance/support for the mother.

- **IDEAL**
  - The contact workers accompany the child to the place where they will be cared for from now on (school, childcare facility, etc.) and they introduce the child personally.
  - It is important to have a next steps process that works well and starts early enough. Especially if there are insufficient resources for follow-up care, it is necessary to ensure children are put in the care of competent third parties.

- For children that were victims/witnesses of violence it is very important to talk about separation and saying goodbye, so that they can be prepared for leaving the shelter. Very early on the eventual termination of the counselling should be discussed.

Moving into a temporary accommodation

When a woman has the option to move into a temporary accommodation for a transition period, another risk assessment is conducted as preparation.

This assessment must not show any indicators for immediate danger or threat, while it is necessary to keep in mind that the risk situation can change at any moment. This means that risks and dangers must be assessed continuously and safety measures be taken accordingly. Returning to a women's shelter might be necessary to protect the women/families.

Temporary homes are suitable for those women and children who need ongoing, regular supervision and support, however not at the intensity that is provided at a shelter. Through this type of follow-up care, setbacks and crises are managed and accomplishments are solidified. This helps women and their children establish an independent life in safety. Another goal is assistance in securing affordable, long-term housing.

5. Cooperation: leadership within the network*

This entails cooperation with institutions/facilities such as:

- Childcare facilities (school, kindergarten, etc.)
- Youth welfare
- Police
- Justice systems
- Other authorities

- **MINIMUM**
  - Shelter staff initiate exchange between facilities if necessary
  - All psychosocial work with children by external professionals includes a safety plan.
- **OKAY/NORMAL**
  - Schools and kindergartens are aware of the child's situation and are attentive to possible risks and dangers. In such cases they immediately inform the shelter.
  - Good contact with the police, justice system and other authorities, exchange is (usually) possible quickly.
- **IDEAL**
  - Networking happens through regular exchanges between service providers and support facilities, independent of specific cases.

* Leadership refers to the role that women's shelters take in the cooperation and networking with other institutions.

Safety and risk management

When children arrive at a women's shelter, they come from situations of immediate crisis. Usually, they have to leave their home in an unplanned way, and while shelters mean safety for mothers, they can mean uncertainty and fear for a child. This is especially true if contact with their support system, like grandparents or friends, is hardly possible. Additionally, children are not necessarily safe from violence during their stay at a shelter.

The risk of being exposed to violence exists before, during and after their stay at the shelter. Safety threats and violations can come from various parties: the father or (ex-)partner of the mother, the mother herself, residents within the shelter (women or children), their extended family, the kindergarten or school or administrative rulings.

All children in women's shelters (and many children outside) have experienced violence or menacing situations. Therefore, safety and risk management in shelters cannot only focus on reducing risks from the previous perpetrator. Attention needs to be given to other sources of danger and stress and to the stabilisation and strengthening of the child by implementing a broader understanding of "safety".

Being a witness of violence against their mother **increases the risk of becoming a victim of violence significantly**. This includes violence experienced at the hand of the father and/or mother as well as other family members (e.g. siblings). There is also an increased risk for being involved in violence in other ways: peer violence, environments that condone or even support violence, exploitation through child predators, unwanted sexual encounters and sexual violence in their own first relationships, bullying and different forms of violence in digital spaces (e.g. social media).

> Being a witness of violence against their mother increases the risk of becoming a victim of violence significantly.

At the same time, existing experiences with violence increase the risk for the children becoming violent themselves – this applies especially to boys. Health burdens (including PTSD, gastro-intestinal complaints, abdominal pain/discomfort, substance abuse, general pain, depression, suicidal thoughts) together with social effects of domestic violence and interferences in the child's development and education interact with the risks of violence presented above. In the worst case, this results in a spiral of violence and social drift (see Felitti resp. Centers of Disease Control and Prevention [CDC] 2019).

The objective of risk-sensitive pedagogical work with children includes the identification and mitigation of existing risks, the stabilisation and strengthening of children regarding different forms of violence, its intentions and impact. Prevention should not only anticipate violence but also illustrate alternative strategies for self-efficacy, finding your position in a group, etc.

The SafeShelter concept includes a systematic evaluation of past experiences of violence and known risks, as well as circumstances that increase the risk of violence. This refers to information regarding the perpetrator, the (extended) family, setting, media and entails questions about the child's personal beliefs. Also relevant are the resources of the child, which include coping strategies, existence of a support network or support person, and role models, their interests and favourite activities.

In a first step, this systematic assessment focuses on the immediate family and surroundings. This includes the different aspects of the violence against the mother and the mental and social situation of the perpetrator. The next step is looking at the burdens and resources of the individual child. In Part IV. Resources, **Annex 1, Checklist (page 40)** you will find a corresponding checklist. This checklist includes several factors that should be considered when assessing the child's position in the situation.

Part III. Child Safeguarding Policies for shelters

Why have a Child Safeguarding Policy in a shelter?

Children in women's shelters are among the most vulnerable as they have been exposed to an unstable, over-burdened and dysfunctional family life. Many children have experienced potentially traumatising events in the home. On average, children in care are exposed to more than ten risk factors related to child abuse and domestic violence.

Arriving at the shelter does not necessarily mean that the children are safe, since they might be affected by on-going violence such as threats from the father, problematic behaviour from the mother, aggression from other children in the shelter and bullying. Children entering a shelter may feel uprooted or isolated, with interruptions to their schooling. As a result, these children have a greatly increased risk of becoming victims or perpetrators in the future. This makes it even more crucial to assess their safety in different contexts and strengthen and support them in their development. Support, acknowledgement and strengthening of relationships are key factors for the development of psychological stability in girls, boys, nonbinary and trans children. Addressing and working through gender-specific role expectations that promote violence plays a crucial role.

Advantages of a shelter specific policy

Having a specific Child Safeguarding Policy for children ensures the independent position of the child, a child-friendly environment and a focus on the recovery and future-oriented development of the child. Such a policy has added value because it defines what the sector understands by 'safe care' for children in shelters.

Therefore, each and every shelter should have a Child Safeguarding Policy for the following reasons:

- To assess risks and dangers children may face in a systematic, transparent and continual way and therefore consequently protect children in women's shelters and advocate for their right to a safe upbringing (in and out of the shelter).
- To advocate for the right to a safe upbringing as a principle of every child-centred pedagogical, social and judicial intervention.
- To promote good practice in the shelter that ensures programmes, operations, staff and partners keep children safe and work in a child-centred way.
- To safeguard children in shelters and be able to respond appropriately when concerns and incidents arise.
- To emphasise the role of women's shelters in domestic violence interventions, especially regarding the safety and wellbeing of children involved.
- To protect not only the children in care but also the shelters staff and external professionals.

The policy makes clear to everyone that children must be safeguarded.

To find out how well your shelter safeguards children, try the Child Safeguarding Self-Assessment Tool by the Keeping Children Safe organisation (see **Annex 2, page 44**).

How to write and implement a Child Safeguarding Policy in 4 steps

Here are 4 steps for a shelter organisation to follow to improve Child Safeguarding for children residing in shelters:

Step 1: Write a policy – outline the ways and means of how your organization (staff, volunteers, programmes) interacts with children and what measures are in place to prevent harm to children and to respond when safeguarding concerns arise

Step 2: Involve staff – place clear responsibilities and expectations on staff and associates and provide support to understand and act in line with the policy that is approved and signed by management

Step 3: Implement Child Safeguarding Policy to create a child-safe environment

Step 4: Monitor, respond and review Safeguarding Policy and assess possible risks

The following section is a description of how to implement each step, including a checklist and do's and don'ts.

Step 1: Write a Safeguarding Policy

The Shelter develops a clear policy that outlines what measures are in place to prevent harm to children and to respond when safeguarding concerns arise.

Policy reflects the rights of children to protection from abuse and exploitation as outlined in the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child

- Includes guidelines for appropriate and inappropriate behaviour of adults towards children and of children towards other children
- Policy is approved and signed by the organisation's management body, applies to all the organisation's staff and associates

Checklist for step 1

The following documents can be used to provide evidence that the step 1 has been met:

☐ A copy of the policy, signed and dated by the management board and including a date for review

☐ Policy translated into local/relevant languages

☐ Examples of ways the policy has been promoted, including to partners, children and women in the shelter and communities

Do's & dont's for writing a policy:

✔ **Do** use other organisations' Child Safeguarding Policies to inform yours, however, don't just replicate it

✔ **Do** work with a group of relevant staff to develop and disseminate the policy

✔ **Do** make a child friendly version for children you work with

✖ **Don't** develop a policy document that just sits in the office

Must–have elements of the Child Safeguarding Policy

▪ Definitions, including risks that may affect children in the specific context of the organisation activities and its mission

▪ Clear information about staff responsibilities when working with children

▪ Description of safe recruitment procedures (including criminal background checks for employees, volunteers and trainees)

▪ Information about data protection procedures

▪ Information about training of staff on Child Safeguarding and Child Protection Policies, when this happens (e.g. during induction) and how frequently staff must attend refresher training

▪ Information about how often and by whom the policy is revised, e.g. annually

▪ Indication of who will act as a Child Safeguarding contact person/lead (core role, not an add on to an existing full-time job)

▪ Information about safeguarding reporting procedures, incl. forms and clear instructions who should be informed and when

▪ Clear indication about referral to child protection systems outside the organisation

▪ Information about a complaint mechanism

▪ Language of the policy must be strong and clear (not may, but must, not should, but have to)

▪ The policy must be available publicly (online) i.e. transparent to all those who come in contact with the organisation

▪ Policy is signed by management, e.g. the Director/Head of office

See **Annex 3, page 45,** for examples of Child Safeguarding Policies used by different organisations.

Step 2: Involve staff

The shelter places clear responsibilities and expectations on staff and associates and supports them to understand and act in line with the policy.

- Everyone in the shelter understands and has a role to play in the safeguarding of children in the shelter
- Ensure all persons associated with the shelter understand safeguarding specific to children residing in shelters, for example all staff should undertake precautions when sharing information about children when communicating with other professionals
- Key staff are designated (including director level) as 'contact points' for Child Safeguarding with clearly
- defined roles and responsibilities
- Recruitment processes have strong Child Safeguarding measures in place, including a criminal record check (or alternative in some country contexts), an employment history check and at least two verbal reference checks (see **Annex 6, page 49**)

Training for staff on *Child Safeguarding*

It is recommended that training is provided at team meetings or offsite planning days to provide targeted sessions on Child Safeguarding where it directly relates to the work of the team. This is something that can be delivered in addition to Child Protection training that all staff must attend as part of their induction (see **Annex 5, page 47**).

These trainings should facilitate discussion on:

- How does the Child Safeguarding Policy apply to the respective team and various staff members in the team?
- What role do the various team members play in implementing various aspects of the policy?
- How to establish a risk assessment protocol for the shelter if it is not in place and review how to carry out a risk assessment.

Checklist for step 2

The following documents can be used to provide evidence that step 2 has been met:

- ☐ A copy of training plans, course attendance records and course evaluations on Child Safeguarding for shelter staff

- ☐ Copies of age and ability appropriate information for children about sources of support in case of concern, distress or abuse, which are updated annually

- ☐ Lists of contacts for specialist advice and information on child abuse, which are updated annually

Do's and don'ts for involving staff

- ✓ **Do** make sure that all people in the shelter are aware of and trained in the shelter Child Safeguarding Policy and their obligations

- ✓ **Do** discuss openly with partners, children and families what risks are involved and how you can work together to overcome challenges

- ✗ **Don't** assume that everyone who works with children is safe or will do them no harm (perform criminal record and background checks)

Step 3: Implement activities

Shelter creates a child-safe environment through implementing Child Safeguarding procedures:

- A procedure details the safeguarding activities that need to be carried out to fulfil the policy (see **Annex 4, page 46**, for a specific list of activities)

- Safeguarding activities are integrated into existing organisational processes and systems and, where necessary, new procedures are introduced

- Mapping exercises are done to provide information on the legal, social welfare and Child Protection arrangements

- Child Safeguarding risk assessments and mitigation strategies are integrated into existing risk assessments and a reporting and responding process for incidents and concerns is in place

Checklist for step 3

The following documents can be used to provide evidence that step 3 has been met:

- ☐ Documentation exists that shows recorded cases of risk assessments and mitigation strategies, as well as learning and improvements that can be made

- ☐ Reporting flowcharts on what happens when a risk is reported

Do's and don'ts for safeguarding activities:

- ✔ **Do** adopt a strategy of continuous improvement; don't think you will have everything in place immediately, keep a "lessons learned" log

- ✔ **Do** your best to ensure the safety and support of the child throughout the process

- ✘ **Don't** think that you will prevent all possible abuses; the way you respond to abuse is as important as preventing it

Step 4: Monitor, respond, review

Shelter monitors and reviews its safeguarding measures:

- Measures and mechanisms are in place for monitoring and review of Child Safeguarding performance, e.g. review of policy once a year

- Active monitoring, before things go wrong

- Reactive monitoring, after near misses or when things go wrong

- Progress, performance and lessons learnt are shared with staff

- Policy and lines of action are assessed regularly, e.g. annually

Checklist step 4

The following documents can be used to provide evidence that step 4 has been met:

- ☐ Self-audit assessments of Child Safeguarding

    1. What have been the key achievements in Child Safeguarding by the organisation?

    2. What new Child Safeguarding procedures or measures have been developed and implemented?

    3. What good practice examples in implementing Child Safeguarding would you like to share?

        Why did they work well?

4. What challenges have you faced in implementing Child Safeguarding Policy and procedures?

5. What gaps have been identified in the Partner Capacity Assessment requiring follow up?

6. Have records been kept for the recruitment and screening of personnel in contact or working with children? Ask to see the records to monitor standards for recruitment and screening (see **Annex 6**).

7. Have you engaged any volunteers for programmes or activities? Do they have contact with children and if so, how were they recruited, reference and security checked and screened?

8. What, if any, extra support or resources do you need to implement Child Safeguarding in your shelter?

☐ Child Safeguarding annual reports

Do's and don'ts for monitoring

✔ **Do** be transparent with your information on Child Safeguarding and respond appropriately to concerns. Your organisation's credibility and children's safety depend on it

✔ It is only through monitoring that you will discover whether your efforts have been successful

✖ **Don't** rely on having a policy as a measure of accountability. Being accountable is ensuring that policy is being implemented

"Children in shelters are among the most vulnerable children. Nearly all children have experienced potentially traumatic events and are traumatised. Children are also very flexible and working with them, supporting them and most important listen to them and give them trust is indescribably beautiful to experience. We can help them to overcome trauma by just doing the right things with and for them!" — Women's shelter staff

Care programme in shelters throughout the Netherlands

Shelters in the Netherlands have a special care programme that works in partnership with mental health professionals and remedial educationalists at their disposal. The care programme is based on a standards framework in the Netherlands for women's shelters and children in shelters. The indicators of the care programme are:

- Guaranteeing acute and long-term safety
- Risk-based care plan
- Recovery and future-oriented care/trauma processing, social-emotional development

When a mother and her children arrive at the shelter, staff members use an established checklist and risk assessment instrument to map the safety risks for the mother and children. The staff provide intensive guidance to mothers with children, including step by step information on how to deal with security issues, e.g. turn off the use of a mobile phone with, for example, GPS and location services, block IP addresses when using a computer. This is of primary importance because the mothers are coming from and are often still in life-threatening situations, which sometimes also apply to the children. Each mother and her child/children receive their own supervisor and shadow supervisor within the shelter. The loyalty towards both their parents is almost always clearly present for the children and in these circumstances the attitude of the staff plays an important role. Cases in which mothers are worried about the safety of their children are when there is agreed face-to-face contact between the children and the fathers. Although these contact moments are almost always in a safe and independent location and always are supervised by shelter staff, members of professionals from youth care or Child Protection, for the mothers it can often be scary. Although the children are aware that they cannot disclose the city or location of the shelter, they still are children and happy to see their fathers and would like to tell them everything they are experiencing, like new friends or a new school. These meetings are therefore very well planned and prepared for with the mothers.

Part IV. Resources

In this section a list of resources is provided to assist staff of women's shelters in their commitment to improve Child Safeguarding in their shelters.

Annex 1: Checklist for safety and risk management

This checklist is not meant to be used as a questionnaire but rather as a resource for assessment. It does not entail every topic that might be relevant for pedagogical work as its focus lies on the strains/effects of violence and the child's resources. Experienced social workers can use this to develop tailored individual strategies for strengthening the child. Since the child's development in the women's shelter is continual, many of the questions below need to be revisited repeatedly.

1.1 Questions about the relationship dynamic between the parents	
Duration and history of the couple's relationship (Did the mother have other relationships or break-ups/divorces prior to this? What was the reason for the breakup/divorce?)	
What was the first violent incident in the current relationship?	
What does the woman remember as the cause, how does she remember the context?	

How did the woman react to the violence?	
Was the perpetrator violent during her pregnancy?	
Was the perpetrator violent during infancy?	
What factors caused stress or tension in the relationship (financial, health related, social, etc.)?	
Did the perpetrator consume alcohol or other drugs around the time of his acts of violence?	
What notions of gender roles shaped the relationship? (How were responsibilities assigned, who was primarily responsible for caring for the child/children, etc.)?	

1.2 Questions about the type and the extent of the violence

How/In what ways did the perpetrator commit violence?	
How often?	
Did the perpetrator choke or strangle the woman? Did he threaten or injure her with weapons?	
Did the time intervals between the acts of violence change?	
Did the intensity of the violence change?	
Were the children involved in the acts of violence?	
Were there incidents of violence against pets?	
Were third parties threatened?	
Did the perpetrator become violent towards other people?	
Did the father/perpetrator threaten to commit suicide?	
Did the father/perpetrator threaten to kill the mother or the children?	

1.3. General questions about the child/children

Was the child born in or out of wedlock?	
Is the declaration of fatherhood legally binding?	

Are there existing court decisions/rulings concerning parental rights?	
Were the pregnancies planned consensually?	
Were the pregnancies mutually wanted? (meaning they might not have been planned but welcomed)	
How did the birth take place? (where, difficult/easy, complications, etc.)	
Was the father present during childbirth?	
Did the mother struggle with post-natal depression? Was she overwhelmed or unable to cope?	
How did the father behave after birth? (supportive, jealous, cold, etc.)	
What was the decision-making process regarding kindergarten/school, vaccines, leisure time activities, sports, etc.?	
Where do the parents agree on questions regarding upbringing/discipline, and where do their opinions differ?	
Did the child show behavioural problems/disorders? (e.g. baby colic)	
What illnesses did the child already go through? (e.g. chicken pox)	

1.4. Questions concerning violence within the family

Where was the child when the violence took place? During which acts was the child directly present?	
Was the child directly involved in the violence against their mother?	
How did the child respond to the violence against their mother? (trying to protect her, running away, hiding, etc.)	
Is the father trying to contact the child directly? How? About what?	
What forms of violence were used against the child? (including violence from grandparents, other family member or third parties)	
Was the child a victim of sexual abuse/assault?	
How did the father react to misbehaviour/breaking rules from the child? Did he discipline/punish the child? If yes, how?	

How does the mother react to misbehaviour/breaking rules from the child? Does she discipline/punish the child? If yes, how?	
What position does the child take in the birth order? Is there a hierarchy between the siblings? Are there incidents of violence/exclusion/etc. between the siblings?	
Does the child show violent behaviours? Towards whom? In what situations?	
How is the relationship of the siblings with the father and mother?	

1.5. Questions concerning other experiences with violence

Is the child experiencing bullying or other forms of violence in his school/kindergarten?	
What other forms of violence has the child experienced? (e.g. war, (forced) displacement)	

1.6 Resources and barriers to process experiences of violence

How is the mother-child relationship and how is it developing?	
How is the father-child relationship and how is it developing?	
Is the child showing signs of PTSD, ADHD or other mental strains?	
Health and health related issues, conditions, etc.?	
Are there supportive/protective persons in the family?	
Are there important persons or figures (e.g. heroes/heroines) for the child?	
Does the child have friends from before their stay at the shelter?	
How would it be possible to keep the contact with their friends?	
How does the child cope with different stressful/straining situations? (calm, with psycho-somatic symptoms, aggressive, fearful/scared, etc.)	
How is the development of the child's personality/sense of self? (assimilated-fearful, courageous-boisterous, reluctant-reserved, dreamy, responsible-rational, decisive, harmonising) How does this change in different circumstances?	

Annex 2: Child Safeguarding self-assessment tool

Every organisation needs to think about the implications of their work and the safety of the children they are working with, or for.

Keeping Children Safe (KCS) offers a free online self-assessment tool to get a fuller picture of how an organisation is doing with regards to Child Safeguarding, available in English, French, German and Spanish:

www.keepingchildrensafe.global/your-self-assessment

The self-assessment tool consists of five sections and takes about 30 minutes to complete. The results are then emailed to the respondent with advice about actions to take to ensure children are kept safe. The results are confidential and can be discussed with KCS for further guidance.

> „Preventing harm to children in organisations takes more than policies and procedures, it requires leadership, accountability and culture change. It means listening to children and transforming the entire mission of your organization to put their rights, dignity and safety at the heart of every decision." — KCS statement

Until now, this tool is not tailored specifically to the work and circumstances of women's shelters.

Oak Foundation Child Safeguarding Policy and video: **oakfnd.org/values-mission-history/child-safeguarding**

Annex 3. Examples of Child Safeguarding Policies

Here are a range of different Child Safeguarding Policies from non-governmental organisations working with children:

- **UNICEF** Policy on Conduct Promoting the Protection and Safeguarding of Children: www.unicef.org/supply/documents/policy-conduct-promoting-protection-and-safeguarding-children

- **Comic Relief's Safeguarding Framework**, Interview with Karen Walker-Simpson, Head of Safeguarding, Comic Relief: audiovisual.ec.europa.eu/en/video/I-183103

- **Empowering Children Foundation** – Child Protection Policy: fdds.pl/_Resources/Persistent/d/4/5/2/d452533e17e1cc1f537e4e3ebf6492d55b13ab50/Child%20Protection%20Policy.pdf

- **ARSIS** – Safeguarding Children and Youth Policy Procedures: www.arsis.gr/wp-content/uploads/NEW-ARSIS-CHILDREN-AND-YOUTH-SAFEGUARDING-POLICY-AND-PROCEDURES-Final.pdf

- **Terre des Hommes** – Child Safeguarding Policy (EN, FR, DE, ES): www.tdh.ch/en/media-library/documents/child-safeguarding-policy; Interview with Tudor Rosu, Regional Resource Mobilisation Manager, Terre des Hommes: audiovisual.ec.europa.eu/en/video/I-183111

Examples in German:

- Terre des Hommes – Child Safeguarding Richtlinie (EN, FR, DE, ES): www.tdh.ch/sites/default/files/dd358325-4126-43b1-9cda-81121b4b7017_r_pse_d_pol_de_original.pdf

- Der Paritätische Gesamtverband: Arbeitshilfe Kinder- und Jugendschutz in Einrichtungen, 3. Aufl. 2028: infothek.paritaet.org/pid/fachinfos.nsf/0/c56c32e33ea9b1fec12582c2003e26fc/$FILE/kinder-und-jugendschutz-in-einrichtungen_aufl-3.pdf

- Evangelischer KiTa-Verband Bayern: Handreichung zur Erarbeitung eines einrichtungsspezifischen Kinderschutzkonzeptes, 2020: www.evkita-bay-ern.de/fileadmin/user_upload/materialien_a_bis_z/kinderschutz/Arbeitshilfe_zum_Schutzkonzept_2020.pdf

- Frauenhäuser in Süddeutschland, 2010: Das Frauenhaus – ein guter Ort für Kinder! (Broschüre): www.fhf-stuttgart.de/files/frauenhaus_guter_ort_s_d-ag.pdf

- Plattform Kinderschutzkonzepte Österreich: www.schutzkonzepte.at

- EU- Projekt SAFE PLACES – Kinder schützen – sichere Orte schaffen: Ein EU-Projekt zur Stärkung von Kinderschutzstrukturen: www.schutzkonzepte.at/safe-places/

- E-learning-Programm des EU-Projektes Safe Places: schutzkonzepte.at/e-learning/

- Projekt Kinderschutz und Kinderrechte in der digitalen Welt: kinderrechte.digital

Annex 4. Child Safeguarding Policy implementation plan

	Actions	Timeframe	Staff Name	Responsibilities
	Step 1. Write the policy			
1.1	Policy is written with input from all staff			
1.2	Policy is approved by shelter director/ board			
1.3	Policy is shared with all staff			
1.4	Policy is shared with all stakeholders and promoted			
	Step 2. Involve staff			
2.1	All staff have reviewed the policy and provided input			Identify Child Safeguarding learning needs (for example via appraisal system) and ensure they are met.
2.2	All staff have signed the Code of Conduct			
2.3	A person is designated as the Safeguarding Contact Point			Acts as a focal point for receiving information Responds quickly to any request for information or concern. Assesses the risk Ensures that all information regarding incidents is recorded appropriately
2.4	New staff receive a training on Child Safeguarding and review the policy			
	Step 3: Implement safeguarding activities			
3.1	A manual is created with step-by-step guidance on how to proceed in cases of concerns or suspicion of safeguarding issues inside and outside of the shelter			Identify areas of risk and update them regularly. Put mechanisms in place to manage and decrease risks.
3.2	Staff recruitment and selection procedure comply with the policy			
3.3	Risk assessment and management is practiced in all activities involving direct contact with children			
3.4	Ensure that the children and families in the shelter are aware of the Child Safeguarding Policy and know what behaviours they can expect from staff, collaborators and visitors and who to inform of any concerns			
	Step 4: Monitor, respond, review			
4.1	Child Safeguarding contact point performs an annual review of the policy with management			Set up systems to monitor the degree to which Child Safeguarding Policy guidelines have been incorporated into activities.
4.2	Each safeguarding case is responded to within 24 hours and risk assessment performed to prevent such an event from happening again			Set systems in place to moni-tor staff behaviours, attitudes and perceptions. Address concerns specifically and generally through ongoing meetings

Annex 5. Child Safeguarding training agenda

Adapted from Source: Oxfam Australia CS Toolkit

1. Welcome and Key Messages

The training session is to inform participants about the importance of a Child Safeguarding Policy for your shelter. It is about being preventative and for participants to understand the role they play in making each shelter a child safe space. The training session will be an opportunity for participants to ask questions, share their knowledge and experience a safe and supportive learning environment.

When providing training and support for shelter staff, consider the following:

- Acknowledge this is a sensitive topic and may be triggering for some of the participants; if this is the case, a participant can take time out or talk to someone

- The training is about everyone working together to keep children safe

- Start with the positive – these discussions are not about criticising people but celebrating what we do well to protect children and looking for ways to make it even better

- Do not judge or criticise – lead the discussion from positive practices to those which "could be improved" to enhance Child Safeguarding or those which "we need to think about how they impact children"

- Offer constructive criticism and suggestions for improvements if you identify feedback from a participant that you feel does not represent good practice

- Emphasise we are all in a constant process of learning from others and that it is healthy to discuss different ideas for the benefit of children

- Acknowledge that culture is not static – it changes. Give an example of something that used to be commonplace within your culture some years ago but that has since changed for the better and the previous practice is now considered to be old-fashioned

- Provide national, regional and international child rights agreements that the country has ratified, including case confidentiality and limits to data confidentiality when dealing with issues of Child Protection

2. What is Child Safeguarding?

- Definitions "child" and "Child Safeguarding"
- Unpack the concepts of "working with children" and "contact with children"
- Why Child Safeguarding is important
  - *Child Safeguarding is a preventative and proactive measure to keep children safe*
  - *Child Safeguarding is a shared responsibility*
  - *Child Safeguarding includes awareness, prevention, responding and reporting*

3. 4 steps to Child Safeguarding in a shelter

Shelter staff should understand the purpose and key principles of the policy and how it applies to all areas of programs and activities (see **page 35**).

4. Role of the Child Safeguarding Contact Point in the shelter

Participants should have a clear understanding of the role and responsibilities of this lead or contact point.

5. Child Safeguarding Reporting Process

Raise any type of concern in a confidential and professional way: this is the right thing to do to keep children safe. Participants need to feel confident about how their concern will be handled by the organization and that any investigation will give everyone the right to have their say.

> **Training exercise:** ask the participants to discuss and present what they think should be in an incident reporting form around Child Safeguarding.

6. Child Safeguarding Implementation Plan

Participants should develop ways in which they can implement Child Safeguarding into their area of work using the Implementation Plan (see **Annex 4, page 46**).

7. Conclusion

Participants to have the opportunity to raise any final questions or comments from the training session.

Free online resource: Child Safeguarding Self-Assessment Tool from Keeping Children Safe:

www.keepingchildrensafe.global/your-self-assessment

This is a tool to conduct a self-assessment on their organization, to gain an understanding of how to conduct a Child Safeguarding risk assessment and what tools to use. Available in English, French, German and Spanish.

Participants should leave the training session feeling they can contribute to each shelter being a child safe organization in a preventative and positive way.

Annex 6. Recruitment of shelter staff with focus on Child Safeguarding

When evaluating applicants for working at the shelter, ask questions to:

- test their levels of awareness in relation to the problem of child abuse and exploitation and the risks to children relevant for the position

- test their understanding of the Child Safeguarding Policy and Code of Conduct received prior to the interview, the applicant's commitment to the principles and values in the Child Safeguarding approachand their ability to conduct themselves in a way that is consistent with these standards

- gather a sense of the applicant's personal and professional values and practices in relation to work with children and contact with children generally

- assess whether applicants understand the position of trust they hold and the importance of acting in the best interests of children at all times

  - **Ensure that a criminal record check is carried out and clear prior to recruiting to position**

Reference checking is an important part of the screening process. It allows hiring managers to probe any outstanding questions you may have about your preferred applicants. It is important to ask referees for examples of behaviour which support the applicant's suitability for a position. All reference checks should be verbal, and you should verify the identity of the referee and their relationship to the applicant.

Sample questions *(source Oxfam Australia):*

Direct and challenging questions encourage self-selection (i.e. applicants withdrawing themselves from the process) and may assist the interview panel to assess the attitude of the applicant towards children and dealing with children. The exact questions should be adapted to suit the type/level of seniority of the position being applied for.

Awareness and understanding of being a child safe organization

- What are the essential components of Child Safeguarding in a shelter? Do you agree that a Child Safeguarding Policy is important in the context of shelter work? What relevance do you believe it has to your role?

- What do you think working in a child safe organization means?

- What motivates you to work in a shelter, in this particular programme?

- What boundaries are important when in contact with children?

- Please provide me with an example of how to interact safely with children

Child focused questions

- What are some of the main rights of children?

- In your role, you will be required to work with children. Are there any age groups you feel more or less comfortable working with (asking follow-up questions about why an applicant has a strong preference can help you determine if there is cause for concern).

- How are children residing in a shelter vulnerable?

- How would you create a child safe and friendly space for an activity for children?

Accountability

- If you were concerned about the actions or behaviour of a co-worker/partner staff/ visitor towards children, how would you respond?

- Have you ever worked anywhere where a colleague abused a child? What happened and how was it handled? What did you think of the way it was handled? Would you have handled it differently yourself?

- What have you done when a colleague/friend has broken a rule, procedure or code of conduct?

- What would you do in a particular situation? (Set up scenarios that involve potential concerns, boundary issues or child/youth policies and interactions to assess the applicant's response. Be concerned if applicants disregard the organization's policies and procedures or handle a situation poorly.)

Previous experience working in community/contact with children

- Have you worked/volunteered in a similar position before where you had contact with children in the community? What did you like about it? What did you find difficult?

- Tell me about a time you worked closely in communities or in the field and the position required you to interact with community members, including youth and children.

Personal values and qualities

- What strengths in working with children do you bring from your community, family and/or cultural background?

- What qualities have you observed in others that you have admired, particularly in regard to their work with or care of children?

- What do you think makes a good community leader or role model for children and youth?

Annex 7: Additional literature and materials

A: Literature and materials for working with children and teenager (selection*)

Croos-Müller, Claudia (2017): Alles gut – Das kleine Überlebensbuch: Soforthilfe bei Belastung, Trauma & Co, Kösel

Dehner-Rau, Cornelia/Reddemann, Luise (2019): Gefühle besser verstehen, Wie sie entstehen – Was sie uns sagen – Wie sie uns stärken – Mit 31 Übungen, Goldmann-Verlag, München

DER PARITÄTISCHE Baden-Württemberg (2010): Heartbeat – Herzklopfen. Beziehungen ohne Gewalt. Ein Arbeitspaket zur schulischen und außerschulischen Prävention von Gewalt in intimen Teenager-Beziehungen. Stuttgart

Fausch, Sandra/**Wechlin**, Andrea (2020): Vom Glücksballon in meinem Bauch – Kinder erleben häusliche Gewalt – Bilderbuch mit Begleitmaterial, Vlg. Mebes & Noack, Köln

GESINE Intervention: Verhütungs- und Beziehungscheck für junge Frauen (Leporello-Flyer). Fragebogen für die Arbeit mit Mädchen/jungen Frauen zum Thema Gewalt in Beziehungen/Sexualität/Verhütung, **https://www.gesine-intervention.de/wp-content/uploads/9Minifolder-1-2-17.pdf**

Krüger, Andreas (2021, Neuauflage): Erste Hilfe für traumatisierte Kinder, mit einem Vorwort von Luise Reddemann, Patmos Vlg., Düsseldorf

Krüger, Andreas (2016): Powerbook, Erste Hilfe für die Seele – Trauma Selbsthilfe für junge Menschen, Band 1 und 2, Elbe & Krüger-Verlag, Hamburg

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B: Sources and specialised literature

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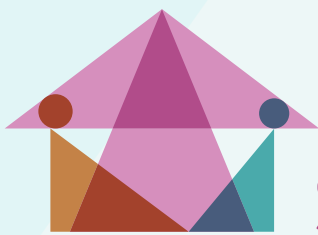
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* A lot more information and materials on this topic can be found on the webpages of

GESINE Intervention **www.gesine-intervention.de** and the **Austrian Women's Shelter Network AÖF** **www.aoef.at/index.php/aktuelle/eu-projekt-safeshelter**

Notes

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