

Standards of the Protection of Children's Rights in the Critical Education Association

1. Foundations of the Standards for the protection of children's rights

The Critical Education Association is an organization that works for various social groups based on the principles of respect and trust in their recipients. When we carry out activities for the benefit of children, we are guided by their good. Based on the Convention on the Rights of the Child, we define a child as any human being under the age of eighteen, unless under the law applicable to the particular child the age of majority is reached earlier.

In the Critical Education Association, standards and procedures are implemented and enforced to ensure the highest possible level of protection of children in all activities and projects, as well as in everyday operations. Our goal is to promote the welfare and protection of children among partners, sponsors, and other collaborating entities. The purpose of this document is to ensure the highest possible protection of children and to clearly present to people working and collaborating with us the rules that need to be followed by all who are a part of our organization's team.

This document is based on the publication of the Go'n'Act Foundation entitled "Everyday activities and children's rights from a global perspective. A guide for non-governmental organizations" (2020), in which a model document was made available under an open Creative Commons license. The author of this template is Magdalena Szymańska. It has been adapted to the specificities of the everyday operations of the Critical Education Association.

Core Values and Principles of the Critical Education Association regarding child protection and well-being

1. All children are human beings – subjects of human rights and children's rights.
2. All children have the same right to protection from all forms of violence and exploitation, regardless of gender, race, health, religion, age, ethnic and national origin, disability, sexual orientation, financial or social status.
3. Harming children in any way is always a violation of children's rights.
4. Harming children in any way is not acceptable under any circumstances.
5. All children must be given the opportunity to develop their potential and any inequalities should be addressed.
6. Every adult is responsible for ensuring that children are protected from abuse and violence.
7. Each person working and collaborating with the Critical Education Association is responsible for the protection of children with whom they have contact during the implementation of the Association's activities.
8. Each person working and collaborating with the Critical Education Association recognizes the superiority of the best interest of the child in all operations and is guided by legal regulations, internal standards of the Association, sensitivity and good will in all proceedings involving or affecting children.

The Critical Education Association bases its activities on the values and principles expressed in the following documents:

- The Convention on the Rights of the Child (adopted on November 20, 1989) and its optional protocols (adopted on May 25, 2000),
- United Nations Charter (adopted on October 24, 1945),
- The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (adopted on December 10, 1948),
- International Covenants on Human Rights (adopted on 16 December 1966),
- Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms – European Convention (adopted on September 3, 1953),
- Beijing Rules (adopted on November 29, 1985),
- Havana Rules (adopted on December 14, 1990),
- Riyadh Guidelines (adopted on 14 December 1990),
- Declaration on the Protection of Women and Children in Emergency and Armed Conflict (adopted on 14 December 1974),
- Minimum Age Convention (adopted June 26, 1973).

2. Child protection standards when recruiting people for work, collaboration and volunteering

All persons operating in the Association are subject to these recruitment procedures – regardless of whether they interact directly with children or carry out tasks that do not involve interaction with children (for example, provide graphics or accounting and HR services), regardless of whether they receive remuneration for their work or volunteer, regardless of whether they work full-time, part-time or on commission.

The purpose of these procedures is to ensure the highest possible protection of children and to recruit appropriate people, best suited to the work standards of the Critical Education Association.

Announcements about looking for people to work or volunteer

All communications about the search for collaborators will include information about the need to strictly comply with these Standards of the Protection of Children's Rights, which is necessary to apply for any position in the Association.

This is not only to select the best candidates, but also to communicate the Association's serious commitment to the protection of children and to discourage potential candidates who do not strongly and unequivocally stand for full protection of children.

Mandatory entries in each job or volunteering offer:

- a) The Critical Education Association in all its activities is guided by the good of children, which is a binding standard for all persons collaborating with us.
- b) Candidates are required to familiarize themselves with the standards of child protection used by our organization, and after being accepted to the team, they will sign a statement about familiarizing themselves with these standards and understanding them, as well as obligation to comply with them at any time during cooperation.
- c) Persons starting permanent collaboration express their consent and willingness to cooperate during the procedure of collecting information about them from the Register of Sexual Offenders.

Interview

If the recruitment procedure includes an interview, it will be conducted in accordance with the following recommendations:

- People who have declared that they have familiarized themselves with the Standards of the Protection of Children's Rights used by the Critical Education Association will be invited to the interview.
- The candidate will be clearly and unequivocally presented with the need to act with the highest regard for the best interests of children at all times and in all circumstances. The candidate will be asked to confirm acceptance of this standard.
- The interview is also an opportunity to assess the 'soft' aspects of the approach to children (empathy, respect, recognition of subjectivity, lack of any discrimination), which are expressed, for example, in the language used, knowledge of children's rights or the way of talking about experience in working with children.
- The interview is also an opportunity to assess any undesirable features or facts in the candidate's CV. It is supposed to discourage potential candidates who are not fully committed to the protection of children's rights and/or have a history of child protection violations, and/or have intentions that are undesirable from the perspective of the child's best interests.

Hiring/engaging people working and collaborating with the Association

Before the official start of work for the Critical Education Association, the following steps will be completed:

1. The candidate will sign a statement that he/she has read, understood and promised to comply with the internal standards of the Critical Education Association (said statement is attached to these Standards).
2. The Association will verify the candidate's status by downloading information from the Register of Sex Offenders.
3. The candidate will sign a declaration about committing any criminal acts in the past (said declaration is attached as Appendix 2 to these Standards).

3. Standards for increasing knowledge and awareness in the subject of child protection

All persons involved in the standard activities of the Association are obliged to update their knowledge on the protection of children's rights (both in the legal and industry standards context). For this purpose, these persons:

- will undergo initial training at the beginning of their collaboration with the Association;
- will participate in all trainings, workshops, lectures, meetings organized specifically for the staff;
- will (as far as possible and necessary) participate (as listeners or observers) in trainings, workshops, lectures, debates, and discussion panels in which other members/staff members are the moderators/experts;
- will (as far as possible and necessary) participate (as listeners or observers) in training courses, workshops, lectures, debates, and discussion panels indicated by board members or recommended by other team members;
- will self-educate in the subjects of children's rights, child protection, child well-being.

4. Standards for interacting with children and responding to irregularities

All employees, associates, and volunteers of any gender always act with respect for the highest possible protection of children and always report (to the authorities of the Critical Education Association or relevant entities) any irregularities in the protection of children or lack of respect for children's rights.

In particular, the following rules must be observed:

a) Persons working and collaborating with the Association may not:

- never, under any circumstances, use violence in any form (physical, mental, emotional, verbal, etc.) against anyone (in particular children, adolescents, their siblings, parents, guardians);
- use physical penalties in any form;
- threaten the child with violence in any form (physical, mental, emotional, verbal, etc.);
- in no way encourage the child (or give him/her any permission) to act in a way that is harmful to himself/herself and/or others;
- behave in a way that is aimed at embarrassing, humiliating, ridiculing, degrading or causing strong emotional discomfort to the participant or recipients of activities (especially children);
- use contemptuous, discriminatory, offensive, condescending language (you should use equality, non-discriminatory, supportive language);
- engage in romantic relationships with participants or recipients of activities (particularly children, but also adult participants, especially young people and/or guardians of children) or behave in a way that condones or suggests the possibility of romantic relationships with the persons mentioned before;
- use language that is socially considered romantic or sexually provocative;
- use your position to establish any relationship with children or other recipients and participants that goes beyond professional duties;
- intentionally influence the religious beliefs of children and other recipients and participants of the Association's activities, or try to persuade children and other recipients and participants of the Association's activities to change their religious views;
- single out any of the children (unless the need for different treatment is dictated by the child's health, disability, or other individual needs);
- be alone with any child in a closed room;
- initiate physical contact (In the event that physical contact is initiated by the child (for example, a hug after rewarding classes), withdraw from it as gently as possible, being careful not to create a sense of rejection in the child. If we're working with the child on an ongoing basis and the child regularly initiates physical contact and/or seeks to establish a deeper relationship – for example, addresses us with the words "I love you like mommy" – this situation should be reported to management).
- invite children home (except when it is needed for the implementation of a specific project that provides for such activities, and the child is under care of a de jure/de facto guardian other than a person working or collaborating with the Association);

- drink alcohol, smoke cigarettes, use any other stimulants in the presence of children and other recipients and participants of activities; buy alcohol, cigarettes, or other drugs for children and other participants and recipients of the Association's activities; organize activities involving alcohol, cigarettes and other drugs; participate (as an employee, co-worker, or volunteer) in events where alcohol or other drugs are consumed (except for exceptional situations, which must be discussed with the Association's management board in advance every time);
- acquire additional financial benefits from the relationship with the child, his guardian or other participants and recipients of the Association's project;
- commit any act that is unlawful, inconsistent with these Standards or inconsistent with the documents listed in section 1 of these Standards.

b) Persons working and cooperating with the Association are obliged to:

- plan and organize all activities while remaining mindful of the safety of children and respect for their rights;
- report any potential risks and difficulties to superiors in a timely manner;
- obtain written permission from management when the planned activities include overnight travel involving children;
- encourage children to raise any concerns and to report any difficult situations related to the activities of the Association;
- limit the number of outsiders present during the activities of the Association (except for open-air projects);
- redirect all communication with the media representatives (of both public and private entities) to members of the management board and/or a person designated by the management board as responsible for contact with the media and for external communication;
- act professionally and maintain appropriate boundaries in relations with children and other recipients or participants of our activities;
- treat all children fairly and not favor any child based on a personal relationship with them;
- report any violations or suspected violations of these Standards to a minimum of two board members;
- refrain from resolving a violation or suspected violation of these Standards by confronting the person suspected of violating these Standards;
- refrain from resolving a violation or suspected violation of these Standards by talking to the child and/or other recipients or participants of the activities of the Association.

Violation of these Standards, and/or failure to report a violation or suspected violation of these Standards, may be the basis for immediate termination of the employment/collaboration/volunteer agreement, and in cases provided for by law – notification to the relevant authorities.

The management of the Critical Education Association will make every effort to ensure the anonymity of whistleblowers and to protect them from any potential negative consequences of reporting a violation or suspected violation of the Standards of the Protection of Children's Rights.

5. External Communication Standards

In external communication, the Critical Education Association uses images of various people (including children) and various types of information for educational, informational, promotional and fundraising purposes. These activities will always be performed with respect for the rights of the child and with the recognition by persons working and collaborating with the Association of responsibility for the well-being of children whose image (or other information about them) is used.

The rules applicable to external communication in the context of the protection of children's rights

The Critical Education Association has the following rules for verbal, written, and visual communication:

- Every child has the right to a dignified image, devoid of elements of discrimination, manipulation, and sensationalization. Children should always be presented with respect.
- Images and phrases that are embarrassing, stigmatizing, victimizing, discriminating against children and containing elements of condescension (e.g., 'babies') should be avoided. The language and images should reflect the principle of equality and the recognition of children's agency.
- When possible, the broader context of the presented situations should be included and communicated (e.g., in the form of photo captions).
- Communication must not violate a child's right to privacy. We never put pressure on a child or legal guardian regarding the use and dissemination of any image or information regarding private life.
- Apart from exceptional situations, discussed each time with the Association's board, individual stories and experiences of children should not be made public, especially if they are difficult and/or traumatic.
- Under no circumstances (apart from specially constructed social campaigns) should photos of children, which may be considered as having erotic overtones, be made public.
- When capturing the image of a child, that child must be dressed. It is unacceptable to record images of children when they are naked, dressed only in underwear or swimsuits.
- Where possible, use images that show a variety of children – boys and girls, participants of different ages, capabilities, abilities, and ethnicities.
- We ask children for permission every time we are about to take their picture; excluding situations when it is not in the best interests of the child, or it is not possible, and taking the photo is highly justified. We always respect the child's decision not to give consent to the recording of the image, and do not pressure the child to change his/her mind or encourage the guardian to persuade the child to change his/her mind.
- If a child wishes to withdraw during a recording or photo shoot, we respect that decision and allow the child to stop participating. If the child does not explicitly want to withdraw, but we observe behavior that indicates discomfort and/or embarrassment, we inform the child's guardian, and if this is not possible – we talk discreetly (if possible, where other people can't hear) with the child, and we make sure that he/she wants to continue to record the image.
- When possible, children should be given the opportunity to speak for themselves. Their agency and ability to decide for themselves should be emphasized.
- Wherever possible, we obtain the consent of the child's legal guardians (de jure or de facto) to use the child's image, especially if this image is to be used publicly in social campaigns, fundraising, or in order to raise awareness of children's rights. Every effort should be made to ensure that the purpose of using the image is understandable to the person giving consent.

- If consents cannot be obtained and photographic documentation of the project is necessary, photographs should be taken without recording the image of individual children (for example, a photo of a member of the Association conducting classes and children listening, visible only in a group and from the back).
- Make sure that the photographer or videographer does not spend more time with the children than is necessary to provide the service or has access to children without the supervision of a member or a collaborator of the Association.
- Special care should be taken when photographing children and their caretakers from cultures other than the local one (thus commonly known to those who are capturing the image) and respect the social and cultural rules of these people (for example, do not photograph girls without a head covering if their religion prohibits it, and/or if they don't want it). In the event of a violation of these rules by representatives of the media documenting the events and/or projects realized by the Associations, this fact should be immediately reported to the members of the board.
- Particular care should be taken when using a child's image for fundraising activities. It is not allowed to create messages using images of children in the spirit of the so-called pity charity.
- The image of children should not be used to illustrate a problem that is not part of their experience (e.g., when creating a media note on the celebration of the International Day of Street Children, it should not be illustrated with a portrait of a random participant of any workshops conducted by the Association). When working with child actors (for example, during social campaigns), make sure that the audience is aware of this fact (in order to avoid creating a false impression that the child featured in the campaign has had experiences presented in the campaign).
- In the case of using a child's image recorded by a third party, it should be ensured, as far as possible, that this entity is reliable and respects the rights of the child, and that the photos or other forms of image recording used by the third party do not violate the child's welfare.
- We always put the welfare of the child above our promotional and communication plans, commitments to partners (including grant providers and sponsors) and co-workers, or other needs (e.g., fundraising).

Additional remarks on external communication in the context of the protection of children's rights

All persons representing the Association in contacts with the media establish with them the nature and scope of visual and written materials accompanying the announcements, to ensure full respect for the rights of the child and compliance with these standards.

It is unacceptable to provide media representatives with contact details of a child. Providing data of the child's guardian is allowed only with his/her knowledge and consent.

In addition to the above-mentioned rules, the Critical Education Association conforms to the general regulations of personal data protection (the so-called GDPR).

6. Standards for protecting children from commercial exploitation

At the Critical Education Association, we understand the global interdependencies between the principles of everyday functioning of our organization and their impact on respecting the rights of the child to protection against economic exploitation and excessive work (in accordance with the provisions of Article 32 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child).

When purchasing products necessary for the operations of the Association, the following principles should be followed:

When purchasing food products such as coffee, tea, cocoa, bananas (and other food products that cannot be purchased locally), whenever possible, choose those with certificates indicating that no child labor was used during the production process (Fair-trade, Oxfam Fair Trade brand and others).

When purchasing textiles for the daily functioning of the Association (e.g., Association T-shirts) or to be used during workshops (e.g., materials for decorating during outdoor workshops for children), buy second-hand textiles or textiles with certificates indicating that no child labor was used during the production process (Child Labor Free certificate and others).

Limit the purchase of electronics as much as possible (due to the fact that ethical alternatives to electronic products from leading companies are hardly available).

When making any purchases, always consider the purchase in terms of children's rights, identify ethical options and make a purchase that is neutral in that regard (or, if that is not possible, contributes as little as possible to violation of children's rights).

Appendix No. 1 to the document “Standards of the Protection of Children’s Rights”

I, [name and surname] declare that I have read the document “Standards of the Protection of Children’s Rights in the Critical Education Association”, and that I agree with them and will apply them in practice.

In addition, I declare that I will report each violation of the rules (my own or another person’s obliged by the Standards; committed intentionally or unintentionally) to at least two members of the management board.

[collaborator’s signature]

[date, place]

Appendix No. 2 to the document “Standards of the Protection of Children’s Rights”

Declaration of a candidate for employment/volunteering at the Critical Education Association

In order to ensure the highest possible protection of children during normal operation of the Critical Education Association, we ask you to fill out the following declaration honestly and truthfully. All sensitive data provided in the following document will be treated as confidential.

1) Name and surname of the candidate:

2) Criminal record (general situation)

I declare, that:

- I have never been convicted by a final court judgment for an intentional crime.
- I was/was convicted by a final court judgment for

by _____
on _____ to _____

My comment on this experience (circumstances of the event, reasons for breaking the law, implementation of the penalty, current perspective):

3) Disciplinary measures following inappropriate interaction with children

I declare, that:

- I have never been subjected to disciplinary measures (for example, in previous place of employment or volunteering) for inappropriate behavior towards a child/children.
- disciplinary measures were taken against me (for example, in previous place of employment or volunteering) for inappropriate behavior towards a child/children.

Where? _____

When? _____

By? _____

For what behavior?

My comment on this experience (circumstances of the event, lessons learned, current perspective):

[signature of the candidate]

[date, place]

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