



# **CHILD PROTECTION CONCEPT**

## **of the ACP – Austrian Centre for Peace 2025**

### **INTRODUCTION**

With this Child Protection Concept (CPC), the Austrian Centre for Peace (ACP) seeks to comply with national and international standards for child protection in order to reduce the risk of violence for children and adolescents in the ACP environment and in ACP programmes. The CPC is also intended to raise awareness among ACP employees and ACP cooperation partners.

### **ACP MISSION**

The Austrian Center for Peace was founded in 1982 and is organized as a non-profit, independent, non-partisan association. The ACP consists of the following bodies: General Assembly, Board of Directors, Directorate, Scientific Advisory Board, Auditors and Court of Arbitration. The rights and duties of the members of the respective bodies are laid down in the ACP statutes.

In its work, the ACP focuses in a multifaceted way on three central areas of activity: capacity development, conflict management and research.

Accordingly, the ACP has been committed to peace building at all levels for over 40 years, both nationally and internationally. It offers a neutral platform for dialogue and mediation, whether at the Friedensburg in Stadtschlaining or worldwide. ACP capacity development prepares experts for conflict-sensitive work in crisis areas. And the research at the ACP provides the basis for training and practice.

Peace education focuses on research as well as training and on pedagogical practice in school and extracurricular education, nationally and internationally – and works directly with children, young people and adults.

For its work, the ACP has received the title "Peace Messenger" from the UN and the "Prize for Peace Education" from UNESCO.

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## **PURPOSE AND SCOPE OF THE CHILD PROTECTION CONCEPT**

### **Children and adolescents**

This Child Protection Policy was developed primarily to ensure that the rights of children and young people are respected and protected from violence during their participation in ACP activities, projects and programmes.

### **Employees (internal and external)**

The present standards serve to protect children and adolescents. To this end, they are intended to sensitize ACP employees on the one hand and provide orientation in cases of suspicion on the other. Furthermore, the CPC also serves to protect employees and external experts who work on behalf of the ACP. In the event of suspicion, a fair procedure for clarification is to be guaranteed in cooperation with the responsible institutions. If the suspicion is refuted, clarifying discussions are held with all persons involved.

## **LEGAL CONTEXT**

The rights of children and adolescents, including their protection from all forms of violence, are enshrined in (various) conventions and laws at global, national and regional level, in particular laws on the protection of children and adolescents.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the three additional protocols form the overarching frame of reference. Its four basic principles are a natural part of the ACP's attitude:

- the right to equal treatment
- the priority of the best interests of the child
- the right to life and personal development
- respect for the child's opinion

The Convention on the Rights of the Child defines "any person who has not yet reached the age of eighteen as a child, unless the applicable national law stipulates an earlier age of majority".

The ACP's child protection policy is based on the following principles:

- The best interests of the child: We put great importance to the best interests of the child in all our activities and decision-making processes.
- Non-discrimination: We do not discriminate against any child on the basis of race, ethnicity, gender, religion, disability, age or other characteristics.

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- **Empowerment:** We empower children to participate in decisions that affect them and encourage them to actively participate in our programs.
- **Confidentiality:** We respect the confidentiality of information shared by children and ensure that it is only shared when necessary to protect their safety and well-being.
- **Accountability:** We take responsibility for maintaining a safe environment for children and respond promptly to any concerns or allegations of abuse.

## **LEGAL BASIS**

The content of the ACP Child Protection Concept is based on the following laws, guidelines and standards:

- The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and its three additional protocols
- the international standards for child safety;
- The Federal Act on the Rights of the Child 2016 (BVG Children's Rights)
- the Austrian Federal Act for the Protection of Children and Adolescents (Federal Child and Youth Welfare Act 2013 – B-KJHG 2013)
- the Austrian Criminal Code (StGB), in particular those sections that contain provisions on endangering the best interests of the child;

The ACP's child protection policy is drawn up by the respective child protection officer and approved by the institute's management. The document will be assessed in the light of international and EU standards, practices and experience and will be updated regularly.

## **PEDAGOGICAL ATTITUDES**

ACP employees (internal and external) who work with children and adolescents are committed to doing so with an empathetic, positive and understanding attitude. This basic attitude includes empathy, transparency and fairness and is seen as a prerequisite for respecting and maintaining the integrity of every child and adolescent. Their actions are professional, transparent and comprehensible, they meet professional standards and are characterized by an appreciative interaction with each other.

All ACP employees act according to the principle of equality and do not develop any other exclusive relationships with individual children/adolescents inside or outside the institution.

All ACP employees are aware of their special responsibility as adults and thus as a role model for children/adolescents and maintain a professional distance from all children/adolescents. Neither are manners forced on the young people, nor are they required to disclose more of their experiences, thoughts and feelings than they voluntarily offer. Their individual

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boundaries are respected as well as a "no" from the children/adolescents (exceptions result from the protection mandate and must be discussed collegially).

## **PROHIBITION OF VIOLENCE – AND CHILD PROTECTION**

In Austria, the use of any form of violence against children as a means of education in the family, in schools and institutions has been prohibited since 1989. In case of violence between private individuals, the state also has a duty of protection to prevent it or to protect children from further assaults, to investigate them and to hold perpetrators accountable. Child protection aims to create a protective and empowering living environment for children – to guarantee children's rights to protection from violence and exploitation. This task requires different actors to work together, including family, child and youth welfare, healthcare, schools, school and extracurricular education and leisure facilities, youth work and police. Statutory notification obligations or official notification obligations in the event of reasonable suspicion of child welfare endangerment are intended to ensure that these bodies work together.

## **FORMS OF VIOLENCE**

**Physical, direct violence:** Intentional use of physical force to the detriment of the child, regardless of the intensity of the violence used.

**Sexualised violence/sexual abuse:** Inducement or coercion of children to engage in sexual acts of any kind, analogue or digital; sexual exploitation, for example in the production and dissemination of abuse images on the Internet. Sexualized assaults can also manifest themselves: through the use of age-inappropriate words and concepts; by the actual or threatened sexually motivated touching of a child; through activities without physical contact, such as showing pornographic material or showing or touching one's own genitals in the presence of the child.

**Psychological, indirect, virtual violence:** forms of abuse with psychological or emotional pressure, including humiliation of the child, verbal abuse, fear, ignoring, isolation and imprisonment, stalking, bullying and cyberbullying (using information and communication technologies, e.g. social media) and other forms of psychological violence that manifest themselves predominantly on or via the Internet, such as incitement, Discrimination and grooming (gaining a child's trust via the Internet in order to abuse it)

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**Cultural violence:** Cultural violence can contribute to the fact that violence against children is supported or even approved. Violence against children is not to be tolerated in any form as social or individual behaviour. These aspects must also be taken into account in prevention and protection.

**Neglect:** The withholding of services to satisfy children's needs (physical, psychological, emotional, social) even though the possibility exists.

**"Harmful practices":** Sometimes referred to as "traditional" forms of violence; include certain corporal punishment practices, acts of violence "in the name of honour", female genital mutilation and child/forced marriage.

**Trafficking in children:** Includes the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or reception of children for the purpose of their exploitation, including sexual exploitation, labour exploitation, begging, determination to commit crimes, organ harvesting. The use of certain means to enable exploitation (e.g. threats, deception, abuse of power) is not relevant for children (in contrast to adults), and any "consent" of the children to exploitation is also irrelevant.

**Structural violence:** Does not emanate from an acting subject but is built into the social system. It manifests itself in unequal power relations and consequently unequal life chances of women and men, young and old people, people with different cultural backgrounds or ways of life.

**Gender dimension of violence and exploitation:** Children and adolescents can experience violence and exploitation in different forms related to gender and gender-specific dependency relationships and situations. These aspects must also be taken into account in prevention and protection.

## **PREVENTION**

Violence prevention aims to detect and prevent violence in any form before it occurs respectively to prevent further escalation. Violence prevention creates an awareness of all forms of violence and a social climate of mutual respect, appreciation and support. Violence prevention involves creating safe spaces and educating people about nonviolent behaviour. Violence prevention is a central issue in child and youth protection. It includes measures and strategies to prevent violence and provide a safe environment for children and young people.



## **PREVENTIVE MEASURES**

The core elements of the prevention measures consist of:

- Code of conduct
- Standards for personnel and partner selection
- Sensitisation
- Standards for communication
- Data protection and the right to one's own image
- Appointment of a child protection officer
- Transparent case management

### **Code of conduct**

All persons who work for the ACP agree to act in accordance with the ACP's child protection concept and to respect the dignity of every child and adolescent and to respect their rights to self-determination. They are committed to non-violent coexistence and the implementation of children's rights, as enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. ACP employees are committed to upholding the rights of children and young people in their personal dealings and to protecting them from violations of their physical and psychological integrity.

### **Standards for personnel and partner selection**

When recruiting employees, the attitude towards violence against children and adolescents is addressed. Cooperation partners must commit to complying with the ACP's CPC.

### **Sensitisation**

The ACP ensures that all employees who work with children and adolescents have basic knowledge of violence prevention and non-violent handling, including sexualised violence and recognising signals.

### **Standards for communication with media**

In the production and distribution of media content, the dignity of children/adolescents is preserved, and their identity is protected. The ACP draws the attention of media representatives and journalists to the framework conditions of reporting, including protective measures for particularly vulnerable children/adolescents. The ACP undertakes – in direct consultation with the accompanying persons such as educators/group leaders, etc. – to handle the recording and publication of photos and moving images of children and adolescents with care. For children under 14 years of age, the consent of the legal guardians must also be obtained (which must be confirmed by the respective supervisors). Furthermore, in the case of photos and films, care is taken to ensure that there are no locations and other identifying information that could lead to the whereabouts of children.

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### **Data protection and the right to one's own image**

The standards of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) are complied with regards to photos, videos or personal information about the lives of children/adolescents, as well as any other form of data processing. If the minor is under 14 years of age, the consent of the legal guardians is mandatory, which will be requested in writing by the ACP in advance. Children and young people must be informed in an understandable way about how the information or the image or film will be used. If they do not want to be filmed, photographed and/or interviewed, this must be respected under all circumstances.

### **Child Protection Officer of the ACP**

The Child Protection Focal Point is responsible for continuity in dealing with child protection issues and takes responsibility for dealing with allegations or suspected cases of child abuse.

- Current ACP Child Protection Officer:
- Mag. Ursula Gamauf-Eberhardt MA
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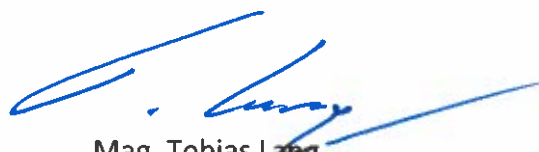
### **Transparent case management**

If a suspected case becomes known to the ACP, the following principles apply:

- Written notification to the Child Protection Officer (CPO)
- Examination and clarification of the suspicion by CPO together with the management

The ACP investigates every reported case. The central point of contact for all suspected cases is the CPO, who carries out the initial investigations, determines whether the suspicion is substantiated or not and decides on the next steps in consultation with the management. All people involved are informed about the procedure in compliance with applicable data protection regulations and confidentiality obligations.

For the ACP:



Mag. Tobias Lang  
ACP Director

Stadtschlaining, April 2025





## **EPILOGUE:**

The following legal matters are particularly relevant and guiding for the protection against violence in Austria:

- Federal Constitutional Act on the Rights of Children of 20.1.2011. the right to a violence-free childhood (Art. 5), the right of the child to appropriate participation and consideration of his or her opinion in his or her own affairs, and the right to the right to participate and take his or her opinion into account in his or her own affairs. principle of priority for the best interests of the child (Art. 1)
- Further constitutional foundations, esp. under the European Convention on Human Rights and the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights
- AGBG § 137, prohibition of force; AGBG § 138, Child welfare
- Federal Child and Youth Welfare Act 2013 – B-KJHG 2013 including § 37, reporting obligation (notifications in case of suspicion of child endangerment)
- Reporting obligations regulated in professional laws, for example in the Medical Practitioners Act
- StGB, Section 1, Criminal acts against life and limb, Section 10, Criminal acts that violate sexual integrity and self-determination - especially relevant §§ 206; 207; 207a; 207b; 208; 208a; 212; 214; 215a as well as § 220b, prohibition of activity.

In Austria, the most important basics for this can be found:

- in constitutional law (BVG Children's Rights, European Convention on Human Rights)
- in child law (best interests of the child and prohibition of violence)
- Child and youth welfare law of the federal and state governments (endangerment reporting, help planning)
- in the laws on the protection against violence (expulsion, prohibition of entry, preliminary injunction)
- in criminal law (e.g. bodily harm, sexual abuse, forced marriage) and in procedural law (e.g. advice under the Non-contentious Act, victims' rights under the Code of Criminal Procedure).

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