

# QUALITY STANDARDS DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK & GUIDE

## CELEBRATING DIFFERENCES, STRENGTHENING SHARED PURPOSES

One of the fundamental strengths of a child helpline is that it develops in response to, and in service of, the needs and concerns of the children and young people around it. The many ways in which the experiences of children differ around the world – expressions of culture, gender, communication, familial and societal roles, and exposure to unique vulnerabilities and risks – necessitate diverse responses to meet children where they are at any moment in time. As such, the child helplines that are now present, in one form or another, in 139 countries around the world, have grown into many different shapes and sizes. But there is also great commonality, from the rights every child is entitled to, to the universal and fundamental need for children to connect and feel heard and valued. In understanding and pursuing these common objectives, child helplines are stronger together.

We will support members through this developing framework, collaborating with them to identify and collect good practices and lessons learned in core areas of a child helpline's quality function. We will facilitate processes of knowledge sharing and peer support in aid of child helplines that request it. We will further be able to identify priority areas for knowledge products, such as tools, training, webinars and guidelines. Finally, and importantly, our Quality Standards are a tool to guide child helplines, donors and partners, and governmental authorities towards *developing* and *adequately resourcing* services and operations capable of providing children and young people in need with high quality responses.

This Quality Standards Development Framework outlines core functions of child helplines as identified through multiple consultations with our members since 2006. These core functions have been categorised into the following observation: high quality organisations are rights-based; advocates for children; facilitators of meaningful child and youth participation; reliable; safe; accessible; child-centred; accountable; and responsibly and effectively operated in emergency settings.



## 1. Rights-based approach

### 1.1 The Child Helpline applies and promotes a rights-based approach to working with children and young people, and is guided particularly by the principles of children's rights: rights to survival and development, non-discrimination, consideration of best interests in all matters involving the child, and rights to participate.

- 1.1.1. The Child Helpline conducts or partners with other organisations to develop or have access to regular (annually or biannually) situation analyses on the rights of children domestically, in order to guide organisational priorities, target services, and train staff. The analyses are guided by child rights principles and include, at minimum, a gender analysis, specific consideration of marginalised and vulnerable groups, and children with different abilities.

*Indicator:* Child Helpline leadership can describe the connection between the situation of child rights nationally with concrete actions taken by the Child Helpline

- 1.1.2. Child rights (particularly the 4 principles) referenced, literally or implied, in staff training with information on local context on legal status and rights violations.

*Indicator:* Staff training includes reference to child rights and information about situation of child rights nationally.

### 1.2 The Child Helpline contributes to national, regional or international efforts to monitor and report on children's rights.

- 1.1.3. The Child Helpline contributes to or collaborates with national and international human rights reporting mechanisms, including by publishing its own report on children's rights (this includes in collaboration with any partnerships or 'parent organisations' of which the Child Helpline is part) or participating in country reports to CRC, alternative reports to CRC, National Human Rights Institutions, global initiatives like the SDG's/Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children, Pathfinding Countries, and/or other national legislation or policy, or domestic rights-based civil society partnerships.

*Indicator:* Child Helpline reports are published widely for public use OR national human rights reporting mechanism or monitoring report includes reference to Child Helpline data.

Grounding the child helpline's work in the international human rights system frames the child as the rights holder in relation to multiple duty bearers. This dynamic is a powerful one with near universal recognition so when advocating for children using a rights-based approach provides opportunity to link the child helpline's efforts to high level negotiations on policies, legislation,



budgets, as well as international reporting mechanisms. The child rights-based approach also provides a valuable and usually well resourced framework for training staff about the principles of working with and for children.

In addition to hearing directly from children, a quality child helpline will also seek awareness and understanding of the situation of child rights in the national context. A child helpline may benefit from partnering with local civil society organisations or networks, universities, national human rights institutions conducting national inquiries, INGOs or other local associations. It is critical that these updated analyses be used to guide outreach efforts, to improve staff development and training, and support timely and targeted, joint or independent, advocacy efforts. In particular, the child helpline should seek to understand risks to child protection online and ways to discuss this with children, including issues like cyberbullying, sexual exploitation, and sensitivity to online risk-taking behaviours.

It is recommended that such analyses take place regularly, annually or biannually, or sooner, if in response to significant changes in children's lives, such as an outbreak of conflict or armed violence, natural disaster, disease outbreak or global pandemic, large migration movements, or other.

### *Resources – Rights Based Approach*

The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action [Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action](#) *Standard 14: Socio-Ecological Approach to Child Protection Programming, Standard 6: Child Protection Monitoring. Guidelines*

Child Helpline International: [Child Helpline International and the Committee on the Rights of the Child Guideline](#)

Childnet International: [Working with Children and Young People Online](#) and [Resources Guideline, Toolkit, ML](#)

Child Rights Connect: [Engaging with the Committee on the Rights of the Child – What can you do concretely? Guideline](#)

Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary on Violence against Children: [Safe and child-sensitive counselling, complaint and reporting mechanisms to address violence against children Guidelines](#)

UNICEF Agora: [Child Rights and Why they Matter E-Learning](#)



## 2. Advocates for Children

### 2.1 The Child Helpline amplifies the voice of children by collecting, collating, and sharing data about children's contacts

- 2.1.1. Contact trends are periodically analysed by the Child Helpline (recommendation is 12 times a year, no less than 4) and are aggregated, to the extent possible, by concern or right violated, age, and other relevant categories determined by strategic reporting opportunities.

*Indicator:* Evidence of at least four contract trend analyses a year.

- 2.1.2. Data driven trend analysis guides advocacy initiatives by the Child Helpline and partners, such as press releases, campaigns, Child Helpline leadership quoted in media, public events held, etc.

*Indicator:* Evidence of trends determining advocacy initiatives (see 2.2)

### 2.2 The Child Helpline seeks opportunity to advocate using children's voices to influence domestic policy, legislation or budget

- 2.2.1 The Child Helpline contributes to national policy, legislation, or budget drafting, by participating in public consultation (independently or as part of consortium), making recommendations to relevant duty bearers, comments on proposals, public statements, or other media advocacy.

*Indicator:* Evidence of Child Helpline's contribution to advancing child rights in domestic governance.

Quality child helplines amplify children's voices towards realising rights for all children. Given that child helplines have unique access to the direct experiences of children there is a responsibility to ensure that those with the power to make a positive difference in the lives of children hear what children have to say. Additionally, child helplines respond to children's needs by providing services or supporting the child through referrals to services already in place. Many child helplines then conduct a follow up discussion with the child to determine their satisfaction with the service or their situation. This process gives unique and independent insight into the quality of services available for children, as well as major gaps in meeting needs. Child helplines therefore have a critical role to play in advocating for the provision of better and more appropriate services for children. Child helplines implementing quality advocacy work should adopt a process of strategising, lobbying, campaigning, using the media, using UN and regional instruments, ethical and meaningful child participation, and monitoring and evaluation. See the Child Helpline International Advocacy Guide for detailed information on these processes.



*Resources – Advocates for Children*

Child Helpline International: [Advocacy: Advocating for Children; Media Collaboration Toolkit for Child Helplines Toolkit](#)



### 3. Participatory

#### 3.1 The Child Helpline actively seeks and engages the meaningful participation of children in developing and designing, monitoring and evaluating, and/or supporting Child Helpline initiatives.

- 3.1.1. The Child Helpline conducts child participation activities at least once a year, but where possible on a rolling basis to the highest attainable standard of the nine basic requirements outlined in the General Comments to the CRC's Article 12.

*Indicator:* Evidence of consideration of the nine principles in planning and implementation of child participation activities.

The Committee on the Rights of the Child determined nine basic requirements of child participation to ensure that it is effective, ethical and meaningful. Quality child helplines will ensure that their child and youth participation activities are transparent and informative; voluntary; respectful; relevant; child friendly; inclusive; supported by training; safe and sensitive to risk; and accountable. It is important to avoid tokenistic approaches, where children's views are limited to insignificant or minor issues, or processes which seek children's perspectives or views but then fail to give those views due weight, or consequence.

UNICEF (2020) further defines four essential features of meaningful participation: **Space:** Adolescents need safe and inclusive opportunities that provide them with space and time to form and freely express their views and opinions. • **Voice:** Adolescents should be provided appropriate information to inform their views, and they should be able to use the media of their choice to communicate their views and to negotiate decisions • **Audience:** Adolescents' views must be respectfully and seriously heard by those with the power and authority to act on them • **Influence:** Adolescents' views should receive proper consideration, and adolescents should receive timely feedback about the outcome(s) and the extent of their influence.

Meaningful child and youth participation should be planned and adequately budgeted for in the child helpline's annual or project cycle reporting. Opportunities for meaningful participation in child helplines are outlined in the Child Helpline International [Guide to Participation in Child Helplines](#).

#### *Resources – Participation*

Child Helpline International [Guide to Participation in Child Helplines](#). (Request e-copy from [Child Helpline International](#)) **Guideline**

Child Rights Connect: [Children's Engagement and Participation in the Reporting Cycle of the Committee on the Rights of the Child](#) **Guideline**



Save the Children: [A Toolkit for Monitoring and Evaluating Children's Participation Toolkit](#)

UN Committee on the Rights of the Child: General Comment No. 12, ['The Right of Children to be Heard' Guidelines](#)

UNICEF: [Engaged and Heard! Guidelines on Adolescent Participation and Civic Engagement Guidelines, Checklist \(Annex 9\)](#)



## 4. Reliability

### 4.1 The Child Helpline adopts a continuous improvement approach towards the number of contacts received.

- 4.1.1. The Child Helpline analyses the contacts received to 'dropped/missed calls' data ratio.

*Indicator:* Regular (recommended at least monthly) reports on contact ratios considered by leadership.

- 4.1.2. The Child Helpline takes targeted steps towards ensuring to the extent possible that children's contacts are received, including in staffing rosters, strategic advocacy and awareness raising activities, efforts to scale up services, or adapt through technologies, etc.

*Indicator:* Evidence of accommodations made to increase ratio of contacts answered to unanswered.

One of the most critical aspects of providing a trusted and reliable service for children in need, is to ensure that, to the degree possible, attempts to contact are received. Due to challenges with limited resources however, this requires the child helpline to monitor contact trends and patterns and to use staff, volunteers and other resources, including technology, to reduce the number of missed contacts. Child helplines may consider 'waiting lists', options to support call back systems, or recorded messages advising other means of access such as letter writing (electronic or physical).

### 4.2 The Child Helpline maintains an updated referral network to direct children in need to relevant, capable service providers, where such services exist

- 4.2.1 The Child Helpline develops and maintains, or otherwise has access to, a regularly updated, geographically accurate referral network of quality service providers for children and families.

*Indicator:* Evidence of updated referral networks include dated mapping exercises (within 12 months), accessing child protection 3W/4Ws in humanitarian situations.

*Indicator:* Staff training materials or processes include referral pathways and ways to update the referral network.

- 4.2.2 The Child Helpline requests safeguarding policies from referral partners and reports any breach of policy in relation to Child Helpline referrals through appropriate channels.

*Indicator:* Evidence of safeguarding concerns or negative feedback about referral partners followed up on by Child Helpline leadership.





Referral network members in support of children and youth can include: health workers and medical professionals; social workers; child psychologists and family counsellors; law enforcement and community police; local offices of the department of education; food services by government and non-government organisations; legal aid services and legal advocates; Children's Rights Commissioners or ombudsman/staff at the National Human Rights Institution; civil society organisations supporting specific issues like anti-bullying, LGBTQI issues, children with disability. Child helplines may benefit from mapping referral pathways for common or particularly serious contacts such as gender-based violence, access to basic services like education or health, unaccompanied/separated children or children on the move, etc.

Referral networks should be reviewed fully at least once a year and updated in real time about service discontinuation or overcapacity. Children and youth can be sources of information about effective referral partners as well. Referral partnerships are strengthened by clear MOUs that outline roles, responsibilities, and communication channels. (A partner MOU template can be found in the Annexes of [Building Your Child Helpline](#)) In addition, the referral partners safeguarding policy should be shared and filed in case children, youth or families return to the child helpline with concerns.

In situations where there are concerns about the safeguarding capacities of mandated responders, such as law enforcement, local authorities or local health providers, the Helpline leadership will need to consider its approach to maintaining legal obligations around reporting and referring (if any) and their duty to uphold the best interests of the child and prevent harm. In these situations, it can be beneficial to have influential individuals on the child helpline's advisory board (see 8.1), or to form strategic associations or networks with other rights-based service providers to advocate for better protection of children and youth.

### **4.3 The Child Helpline uses documented Standard Operating Procedures or protocols that guide staff to reliably, consistently, and accurately respond to children and youth about their rights and access to recourse.**

4.3.1 The SOPs are recommended to contain the following, as well as steps determined based on local context:

- Beginning and ending the conversation, including information about what to do if disconnected.
- Informing the child about their rights to confidentiality, and clearly explaining any limitations to this right.
- Actively listening to the child, establishing a trusting relationship.
- Conducting a brief needs assessment if required, including risks, strengths, and opportunities.



- Seeking consent to initiate referrals or begin case management processes - except in cases where the Child Helpline is legally mandated to intervene.
- Conducting safety planning, if necessary, with the child, including assessing for thoughts about self harm or suicide.
- Confirming child's understanding of next steps or other options available to them at contact's end.
- Correctly entering data into relevant information managements systems.

*Indicator:* Evidence of SOPs and/or training materials covering minimum requirements plus context specific steps.

*Indicator:* Observation of at least four 'active' (non-test calls) contacts with successfully completed checklist above.

Although this standard focuses on common steps and procedures to guide an interaction with a child or young person, the child helpline staff and volunteers prioritise taking the time necessary to establish relationships and allow the child to express their own needs or concerns in their own time. Best practice among our members recommends that children and young people are not 'rushed' to problem solving but are encouraged to express themselves freely and to feel respectfully heard.

SOPs in responding to children and youth are considered necessary by quality child helplines however, to ensure a degree of consistency and reliability of service, and to support staff and volunteers, particularly in child helplines with high staff turnover. Well crafted, child centred SOPs will also further illustrate to the child or youth that the child helpline prioritises their safety, their views, and their needs.

#### 4.4 The Child Helpline has the funding to continue quality services

- 4.4.1 The Child Helpline has access to adequate funding for the next 12 months and a reliable funding plan for the next 24 months (or more).

*Indicator:* Financial records or annual budget show adequate funds for operations for 12 months and evidence of funding plan for 36 months OR assurances from the child helpline Treasurer or similar.

##### *Resources – Reliability*

Child Helpline International and GSMA: [Child Helplines and Mobile Operators Guideline](#)  
Kids Helpline and Yourtown: [Fundraising Toolkit for Kids Helpline Toolkit](#)



## 5 Safety: Do Not Harm

### 5.1 The Child Helpline has developed a publicly facing, widely shared child safeguarding policy that defines harm to children and outlines what measures are in place to respond when safeguarding concerns arise

- 5.1.1 The Child Helpline recognises expansive definitions of the ‘child’ and ‘harm’ in their widely shared policy on child safeguarding.

*Indicator:* The child helpline’s policy on safeguarding and definitions of what constitutes harm is included in materials targeted towards children and youth, including websites, posters, social media, etc.

- 5.1.2 The Child Helpline’s Safeguarding Policy is grounded in the Convention of the Rights of the Child; is actively non-discriminatory; applies to all staff and associates at all times; clearly identifies expected behaviours towards child and young people; identifies areas of potential risk for children and young people due to their association with the child helpline; outlines what measures are in place to respond when safeguarding concerns arise, including independent systems of investigation and accountability and repercussions for staff determined to have breached the policy; designates clear safeguarding roles and responsibilities for each staff; includes a Code of Conduct; and applies to all activities and interventions conducted for and with children.

*Indicator:* The Child Helpline’s safeguarding policy addresses all recommended areas and procedures.

- 5.1.3 The Child Helpline responds immediately and judiciously to reported safeguarding concerns according to its approved policy.

*Indicator:* Safeguarding concerns reported to the child helpline’s responsible department are responded to appropriately by the focal person within the designated timeframe for response and resolution.

- 5.1.4 If the Child Helpline has been assessed by the UN PSEA Assessment, the Child Helpline maintains a Low Risk Rating or is able to progress from a Medium Risk to a Low risk in a period of 12 months.

*Indicator:* If assessed, the Child Helpline received a Low SEA Risk Rating.

The definition of “child” and “harm” may vary across countries and cultures. However, child helpline members have recommended an expansive view and note that a “child” is defined as someone less than 18 years of age, and “youth”, an additional category of potentially vulnerable young person, includes those aged 18-26 years.

Harm to a child should be considered to include all types of physical and/or emotional ill-treatment; sexual abuse, harassment or exploitation; neglect or negligence – including a failure to act to prevent harm or the risk of harm; commercial or other exploitation; which results in actual or potential harm to a



child's health, survival, development or dignity. It is important to note that harm can come to children and young people from those they are in direct contact with or remotely, via online harassment and exploitation.

If the Child Helpline has received the UN PSEA Assessment and was found to receive a Medium or High Risk Rating, the Child Helpline must undergo sufficient improvement within 12 months to be determined Low Risk in order to maintain its standing among our members.

## **5.2 The Child Helpline ensures, to the extent possible, that staff, volunteers or others associated with the Child Helpline's services uphold the values of the safeguarding policy**

- 5.2.1 Recruitment procedures include publicising safeguarding policies, consideration of the roles' access to children and to sensitive data, confirmation of identity, consent for formal background checks, exploration of attitudes towards child protection, and references checks.

*Indicator:* Recruitment policies reflect safeguarding best practices outlined above.

- 5.2.2 Child helpline staff and volunteers are well aware of the child helpline's safeguarding policy.

*Indicator:* 100% of staff have signed the safeguarding policy and are aware of the child helpline's expectations, policies, and how to report safeguarding concerns.

To strengthen recruitment and hiring practices, child helplines may wish to adopt the 12 points from the Recruitment and Selection Checklist outlined in the [International Child Safeguarding Standards](#) from Keeping Children Safe (p. 20), unless currently operating to a higher standard.

*Further, it is recommended also that the child helpline establish MOUs with regular partners and referring agencies and request the organisation's safeguarding policy to have on record. Should issues or concerns arise, the child helpline can use the policy to register complaint, and if the organisation does not yet have a safeguarding policy in place but is directly working and serving children, the child helpline may wish to hold referrals until such time as a working policy is established.*



### 5.3 The Child Helpline has clear and consistent policies and practices on confidentiality which are shared with children and young people contacting the Child Helpline and maintained by all staff and volunteers.

- 5.3.1 Contacts and attempts to contact the Child Helpline do not appear on telephone bills and/or children and young people who contact web-based or text services are informed about how to delete their chat or browsing history.

*Indicator:* Service Level Agreement with telecom provider notes that calls are not listed on telephone bills, **or** other confirmation from Child Helpline leadership.

### 5.4 The Child Helpline responsibly collects, records, analyses and protects children's information

- 5.4.1 The Child Helpline maintains and implements a data protection protocol or similar that clearly outlines secure policies and practices for the following:
- Use of a secure platform for communicating with potentially at-risk children
  - Ensure high levels of password protections, restricted access to relevant staff, or efforts to anonymise children's information in information management systems
  - Data collection practices, specifically, proportionality; only recording what is necessary for case management and trend reporting/advocacy/programme evaluation
  - Documentation procedures, detailing how staff should record and categorise information
  - Data analysis procedures, including what is analysed and when
  - Information sharing procedures, including ways to de-identify data when sharing with partners

*Indicator:* Evidence of a data policy that includes the criteria mentioned and observation of practice in accordance with data policy.

By contacting the child helpline, some children may be further exposed to serious risk of harm. A child helpline must not, in any way, contribute to that exposure and must instead prioritise protecting children who seek assistance. It is critical that the child's contact to the child helpline not be revealed through household telephone bills or other. This includes even a very small risk that the child and/or family is known to a staff or volunteer member of the child helpline. For that reason, and other risks to data security, it is recommended to maintain monitored restrictions to information management systems and the data stored within (see Standard 5.4). The [Responsible Data 4 Children](#) Initiative provides critical principles, case studies for best practice, and assessment tools to guide organisations working with children's data.

Child helplines also strongly consider and regularly review the kind of information they record. It is recommended to record only the minimum amount of information necessary to support the child's wellbeing. As a matter



of safety children should not be pressed for information about their situation, other than that which is required to safety plan.

At this stage, it is recommended by members that child helplines do not conduct counselling via social media messaging applications due to the inability to protect child data. Although some child helplines note that they answer “one off” requests for information via these channels, it has been recommended that children and youth are referred to the child helpline’s formalised and secure communication channels.

## 5.5 Qualified supervisors are able to monitor and coach staff in their interactions with children and young people

- 5.5.1 At least one supervisor (recommended with higher education certification in a relevant discipline, such as psychology, counselling, or social work) is available to staff counsellors during each shift to provide support and monitor communication with children and young people to ensure appropriate interactions at all times.

*Indicator:* Observation of system of accessible supervision and [adequate](#) monitoring of staff and volunteer contacts with children and young people.

- 5.5.2 Staff counsellors have access to regular supervision (recommended weekly or bi-weekly) and access to supervisor debrief support if needed in order to ensure professional development, seek guidance on specific cases, and support staff wellbeing and emotional health in relation to child contacts.

*Indicator:* Evidence of supervisors’ (anonymised) notes OR observation of supervision practices.

Supervision is critical in mental health and psychosocial support services. Supervision ensures quality interventions by helping staff and volunteers reflect on, analyse and share their approaches, beliefs, and skills to the betterment of their work and, for team or group-based supervision, others’. Skilled supervisors can also assist staff to prevent ‘burn out’ and secondary traumatisation, as well as monitoring staff wellbeing generally.

## 5.6 The Child Helpline promotes and applies consideration of the best interests of the child in all media and communications

- 5.6.1 The Child Helpline has a written policy governing media and communications involving children that includes age-appropriate informed consent, confidentiality, and dignified and empowering portrayals of children.

*Indicator:* A review of the Child Helpline’s published materials, including social media accounts, shows consideration of the principles.



## *Resources – Safety: Do no harm*

The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action Case Management Task Force: [Case Management Supervision and Coaching Training Package](#) **Training Package, ML**

Child Helpline International: [Media Collaboration Toolkit for Child Helplines](#) **Toolkit**

Keeping Children Safe: [The International Child Safeguarding Standards](#), **Guideline, Checklist, Multiple Languages (ML)**

Keeping Children Safe: [Free Safeguarding Advice for NGOs](#) **Tailored Guidance**

Inter Agency Steering Committee: [Learning Package on Protection from Sexual Misconduct for](#)

[UN partner organisations](#) **Training Package, ML**

London School of Economics: [My Data and Privacy Online: A Toolkit for Young People](#) **Toolkit**

Médecins sans Frontiers: Psychosocial Supervision Guide Guideline UNICEF Agora: [Prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse \(PSEA\)](#) **E-Learning**

UNICEF [Children's Online Privacy and Freedom of Expression: Industry Toolkit](#) **Toolkit**

UNICEF and The GovLab/NYU: [Responsible Data 4 Children Initiative](#) **Guideline, Assessment Tools**

World Health Organisation EQUIP: [Supervision of Helpers for Remote Psychological Care](#) **E-Learning, ML**



## 6. Accessibility

### 6.1 The Child Helpline actively practices non-discrimination and inclusivity and ensures access to Child Helpline services for all children and young people.

- 6.1.1 The Child Helpline operates nationally 24/7 with contacts free of charge to the user.

*Indicator:* National services are free and operational 24/7 (see comment for exceptions due to financial constraints).

- 6.1.2 The Child Helpline uses child-friendly language to explain their services, confidentiality and safeguarding policies, and other campaigns/awareness raising activities.

*Indicator:* Evidence of a child-led review or 'testing' of campaign messages, webpage text, FAQs, and other, to the extent possible including children with disabilities and other marginalised groups.

- 6.1.3 The Child Helpline develops and pursues strategies to identify barriers to access and provide secure accessible service for recognised marginalised groups, including but not limited to children with disability, children who speak minority languages, children in remote or rural areas, Indigenous or First Nations communities, children who work, LGBTQI identifying children, children in refugee or IDP camps, or children in other vulnerable situations.

*Indicator:* Evidence of targeted actions taken to identify and reach vulnerable groups of children.

If, due to financial constraints, the child helpline cannot yet adequately staff a national service 24/7, it is preferable that they can meet this standard by operating for a shortened, reliable window of time and establishing a free of charge to the user system by which children and young people across the country can submit a report or query 24/7 and receive a timely and secure response. In addition, the child helpline should be able to point to child centred, evidence-based decision making about the times and locations in which the child helpline services are operating. Further, the child helpline should have a funding strategy in place to try and expand its services (this may include strategies to alleviate telephone charges to the helpline also – see the Child Helplines and Telecoms toolkit below).

The child helpline must also adopt processes to continuously improve its outreach to and service of marginalised groups within the country context. Depending on the group and the nature of their vulnerability and exposure to risk, the child helpline may benefit from partnering with specialised service providers, researchers, and advocates to identify barriers to access and appropriate responses. Ideally, this continuous improvement and targeting of one or more marginalised groups occurs each programme cycle.





### *Resources – Accessibility*

Child Helpline International: [eLearning: Inclusive Practice for Child Helplines I, II](#) **E-Learning**

Child Helpline International: [Child Helplines and Telecoms Toolkit](#) (for advocating for free cost of telephone number)

Save the Children: [Information Sharing and Communication with Children and Communities Guidelines](#)

UNICEF [Convention on the Rights of the Child – child friendly text](#) and [icons](#), **Toolkit, ML**

UNICEF: Agora [Inclusive Communication Model](#) **E-Learning**

UNICEF: Agora [Web Accessibility Training](#) **E-Learning**



## 7. Child-centred

### 7.1 Child Helpline counsellors respond sensitively and professionally to children's mental health needs, particularly when children are in crisis

- 7.1.1 Staff coaching and development is overseen by qualified child mental health professionals and addresses, at least, the following:
- Common cognitions and emotional responses frequently observed on the Child Helpline, and culturally relevant, evidence based, best practices in communicating with children.
  - Standardised approaches to safety planning, assessing for risk of suicide or self-harm and providing support in such circumstances.

*Indicator:* Staff training includes awareness of common thoughts and emotional responses of children (across developmental stages) and outlines clear guidance that is based in best practice for supporting children in crisis.

The respectful, compassionate, empowering, and skilled support that staff and volunteers provide to children and young people in need is the core function of a child helpline. Each child helpline will need to work with child focused mental health professionals to develop and train its staff in culturally acceptable ways of adeptly supporting diverse children in all matters from curiosity to crisis.

*Counsellors should be trained and evaluated on their ability to establish an empathic relationship, to hold the child in a non-judgmental and positive regard. Staff should be supported and encouraged to maintain boundaries that protect both the staff and the child. This also leads to consistent, reliable services and fosters a sense of trust in the child helpline, rather than a single individual.*

Staff training and appraisal/evaluation should focus on skilled communication with children, including culturally appropriate expressions of care and regard. These will likely include active [listening](#); [summarising](#); child friendly [language](#); calm and reassuring [tones](#); open ended [questions](#)/helpful [statements](#); empathy and [validation](#); praising [openness](#); encouraging strengths-based planning and action steps; and avoiding judgement, [bandaging](#) statements, giving [advice](#) or making [promises](#).

It is important to train staff and volunteers on typical cognitive and emotional responses to common issues brought to the child helpline, and how to respond sensitively to these. They may include expressions of child and youth self-blame, protection of caregivers, grief, anxiety, curiosity, anger, depression, withdrawal, psychosomatic complaints and other cultural expressions of need or difficulty deemed relevant by local child-focused mental health professionals.



A quality child helpline further trains, coaches or otherwise guides staff to support children and young people appropriately through standardised approaches to safety planning, suicide and self-harm risk assessment, and other serious crisis responses. These standardised approaches should be developed by qualified child-focused mental health professionals and use updated best practices in working with children and locally.

## **7.2 The Child Helpline staff reflect the gender and cultural diversity of children and young people nationally and hold child-friendly attitudes and beliefs about all children.**

- 7.2.1 The Child Helpline actively monitors children and youth demographics nationally and sub-nationally, as well as among Child Helpline contact data, and actively seeks to ensure that Child Helpline staff reflect similar gender identities, linguistic and cultural diversities, experiences, as well as different abilities.

*Indicator:* The Child Helpline exhibits awareness of national demographics and can describe tangible efforts made to recruit and retain staff to meet the diverse needs of children.

It is absolutely critical that the culture of the child helpline embody child-friendly beliefs and attitudes from which to inform their strengths-based support to children and young people. This includes clarity around the fact that children should not be blamed or judged for situations in which they find themselves, particularly where the child is victim of exploitation, coercion, or simply of inadequate protection. At all times, the duty of care for a child lies with the family, the community and society – responsibility for any risk to which the child is exposed lies with those around the child. It may benefit the child helpline to use monitoring tools like an [Attitude Scale](#) to help staff identify and unpack their own values and attitudes towards *all* children – boys, girls, children who identify as non-binary, LGBTQ children and young people, children with disabilities, minority or Indigenous children. Quality recruitment and supervision of staff is important to ensure that counselling staff exhibit supportive, empowering attitudes towards children no matter their circumstances.

## **7.3 [If applicable] The Child Helpline uses a principled approach to coordinated, confidential, and to the extent possible, child-led case management services**

- 7.3.1 The Child Helpline must have clear policies on when, how, and to whom a case management (or follow up service) is provided. At minimum, the case management system must be outlined by clear SOPs or guidelines, monitored by supervisors to ensure timely follow up on commitments and principled planning and action.



*Indicator:* Evidence of supervisory monitoring of case management system for timely follow up and review of principled decision making and process.

- 7.3.2 [If applicable] The Child Helpline's case management procedures involving referrals involve an assessment of the child's needs and strengths, individual or family case plans developed collaboratively with time-bound action and measurable objectives, timely follow ups, recorded in a monitored and secure information management system (see Standard 5.4).

*Indicator:* A sample review of no less than four (anonymised) cases shows uniform assessments, goals or objectives, action plans, timely follow ups.

There is great variation in how child helplines provide case management services, if they provide them at all. Some organisations provide ongoing counselling and establish a 'case plan' or similar for return clients, others will conduct follow up for referrals made, while others still engage in full, face-to-face child (and family) case management services. While this makes it challenging to set universal standards, no matter the size or scope of services, certain principles and practices must be adhered to in a quality response to ensure that it is consistent, reliable, monitored, safe, and expressly targeted towards the survival and development of the child without discrimination.

The child helpline must outline and use standard assessment processes or criteria to determine who receives follow up services. Subsequently, clear policies and procedures are needed to guide how and in what timeframe services are provided.

Child helplines providing comprehensive case management services, whether face to face or remotely, must develop training and SOPs that reflect principles of do no harm, rights to survival and development, non-discrimination, and best interests. The child helpline's case management system must be highly coordinated with national child protection services (where operational) or other professional services holding a duty of care.

Further, training and SOPs must describe strong confidentiality and information sharing restrictions, accountability of service (clarity on roles and responsibilities and who holds the duty of care), high levels of coordination with child and family service providers, guidance on maintaining professional boundaries, facilitation of meaningful participation by the child or youth in their own case planning, strict protocols around informed consent/assent, and guidance on providing culturally appropriate/gender sensitive services.

Ultimately, delivering high quality case management services is a process that requires reflection, flexibility, and highly principled reasoning. A child's best interests may not always be clear and the risk of causing harm and losing trust is often present. It is therefore absolutely critical that this work is supervised by a competent, highly experienced staff member who understands the national child protection system well and can coach, monitor, and guide staff towards better outcomes for children.



### *Resources – Child Centred*

The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action: [Child Protection Case Management Resource Hub](#) **Guidelines, Training Package, E-Learning, ML**

Børns Vilkår. Sindahl, T. N. [Chat Counselling for Children and Youth – a Handbook](#) **Guidelines**

Child Helpline International [Counselling Practice Guide](#) **Guidelines, ML**

Child Helpline International [Gender Toolkit](#) **Toolkit, Guidelines, ML**

Global Social Service Workforce Alliance [Case Management Compendium](#) **Guideline, Training, SOPs**

International Rescue Committee: [Caring for Child Survivors of Sexual Abuse – Attitude Scale Checklist, Monitoring Tool](#)

Kids Help Phone Canada [Live Chat Counselling Pilot](#) **Toolkit**

Kids Helpline Australia, Hawke, P. [“Don’t just listen: Tell me what to do!” Micro-skills model of counselling](#) **Guidelines**

USAID [Case Management Toolkit: A User’s guide for Strengthening Case Management Services in Child Welfare](#) **Guidelines**

World Health Organisation EQUIP: [Providing Psychological Care Remotely](#) **E-Learning, ML**

World Health Organisation EQUIP: [Assessing and Supporting People with Suicidal Behaviours](#) **E-Learning, ML**



## 8. Accountability

### 8.1 The Child Helpline's leadership, planning and finances are overseen by an independent advisory group of relevant experts

- 8.1.1 Governing body chaired by relevant individuals makes informed decisions and exercises oversight of Child Helpline plans, activities and budgets.

*Indicator:* Evidence of relevant Child Helpline information shared with board members leading to informed decision making on strategic/programme cycle plans.

The child helpline board of advisors or steering committee will be a group of individuals who share the helpline's child centred values. Members can and should be from diverse backgrounds, including influential individuals in relevant public and private sectors who can leverage support for the child helpline and its mission, children and young people themselves (see Standard 3.1), experts in the field including mental health and psychosocial professionals or child protection specialists, and/or those who can support the child helpline's fundraising efforts. It is important that members of the board also sign and are bound by the child helpline's safeguarding policy (see Standard 5.2) and that the child helpline aim for inclusive representation.

It is the child helpline's responsibility to ensure that the governing board has access to accurate and strategic information that will assist them in approving plans. This process should be more than a formality - a 'ticking of the box', as the engagement and input from relevant local experts will strengthen strategic planning and deepen connections within the helpline's operating environment.

### 8.2 The Child Helpline is guided by an evidence informed strategic plan that identifies clear goals, objectives and targets

- 8.2.1 A single or multi-year strategic plan or project cycle guides the Child Helpline's work and includes strategic goals, measurable objectives to guide and track whether goals are being met and defined and budgeted activities to reach the objectives.

*Indicator:* Evidence of a strategic plan defined in the Child Helpline International [Good Governance and Accountability Guide](#).

- 8.2.2 The plan was developed on the basis of the situation analyses (see Standard 1.1) and, to the extent possible, in consultation with children and young people.

*Indicator:* Evidence that the child helpline's programme cycle goals and objectives have been based on a rights-based situation analyses.



No matter what its size or governance arrangements, all child helplines need to have a strategic plan, it will not only strengthen the organisation by focusing its efforts and resources but will enable it to deliver more effectively the needs of its beneficiaries. Strategic planning is a process of setting key goals for the organisation, typically for the next three to five years, and laying out a strategy to achieve them through the allocation of financial and human resources. A strategic plan usually consists of:

- A mission statement.
- Goals to achieve that mission.
- Measurable objectives to guide and track whether goals are being met or can be accomplished.
- Specific, assigned activities that need to be completed to attain the objectives.
- Timetable to evaluate progress, update the plan, and make any adjustments or changes.

### **8.3 The Child Helpline, or its governing organisation, is audited or subject to government review annually.**

- 8.3.1 An independent organisation fully audits the child helpline's (or its governing body's) financial records and accounts.

*Indicator:* Annual financial audit reports

### **8.4 The Child Helpline develops and maintains clear human resource policies that contribute to staff wellbeing**

- 8.4.1 The Child Helpline has developed and implements a human resources policy or policies that includes the following:
- Clearly defined Terms of Reference for staff roles
  - Consideration of workplace health and safety including psychosocial wellbeing evidenced by appropriate shift times, break policies, debrief opportunities (see Standard 5.4.2)
  - Non-discriminatory recruitment, supervision and management
  - Other cultural and legal requirements domestically.

*Indicator:* Evidence of human resources policies addressing the above criteria are observed in practice.



## 8.5 The Child Helpline monitors and evaluates its service to children and young people in order to measure impact and support systems of continuous quality improvement

8.5.1 The Child Helpline has developed and maintains a monitoring and evaluation strategy that guides quality improvement in the child helpline's different service areas, including:

- Counselling services – across different medium (chat, telephone, other written communication, etc).
- Case Management services.
- Awareness raising and marketing.
- Campaigns and other major services.

*Indicator:* Monitoring and evaluation reports in the respective areas and evidence of informing.

8.5.2 The Child Helpline seeks the evaluations of clients to determine impact and guide staff performance appraisal and training and organisational systems improvements.

*Indicator:* Evidence of child and youth participation in service evaluation and of subsequent use of views to guide performance appraisals, training and organisational systems improvements.

Adequately monitoring and evaluating the impact and quality of service provided by child helplines is far from simple. A good monitoring and evaluation strategy is underpinned by a clear statement of objectives – what is it that the service is intended to achieve? The child helpline must then design procedures to continuously monitor and periodically evaluate all activities and services across selected indicators of achievement. Indicators may be quantitative (how many people, what percentage of contacts, etc) or qualitative (what changed? What was learned?).

A quality child helpline services uses information collected through monitoring and evaluation process to demonstrate positive, negative, direct or indirect changes that have occurred, or targets reached or not reached, thus providing lessons for consideration in future work. This information should feed into the next stage of programme planning (see Standard 8.2)

### *Resources – Accountability*

Child Helpline International: Child Helpline International [Good Governance and Accountability Guide](#)

Child Helpline International: [Counselling Practice Guide](#) **Guidelines, ML**

Kids Help Phone Canada [Proof Positive](#) **Guideline** (M&E)

Kids Help Phone Canada [Piloting an Outcome Focused Evaluation Framework](#) **Toolkit**





## 9. Responsibly and effectively managed in emergencies

### 9.1 Preparedness – for all Child Helplines: The Child Helpline maintains contingency plans in case of potential emergencies

- 9.1.1 Contingency plans are developed and periodically updated (recommend no less than every 4 years) for potential emergencies. These may include but are not limited to natural disasters, pandemics or major public health concerns, armed conflict or armed violence, and terror attacks.

*Indicator:* Evidence of contingency plans for areas of reasonable risk (as determined by Regional Representatives) addressing human resources, information management systems and technology pathways to reliably access information, and coordination.

### 9.2 In case of emergency: The Child Helpline conducts a timely emergency status review and adapts its services appropriately on the basis of the emergency

- 9.2.1 Enlisting the support of CHI, the Child Helpline conducts a review - within 2 weeks or less if the emergency is rapid onset, or periodically if the crisis is protracted - that addresses, at minimum, the following:
- Safety - of staff and children
  - Impartiality - actioning principles of Do No Harm, review staff profiles to ensure equitable representation of children's demographics.
  - Coordination with national, international, and inter-agency groups and renewed SOPs for case management that include humanitarian systems actors
  - Access to information
  - Information management systems: protection of data and contingencies around data ownership.

*Indicator:* Emergency status review completed and operationalised within agreed timeframes.

- 9.2.2 In case of emergency: On the basis of the technical review, the Child Helpline develops an action plan or amends its existing action plan to accommodate for the emergency.

*Indicator:* Amended action plans that consider additional staff supports, specialised training in trauma counselling, updated review of referral networks, updates to child friendly messaging and awareness raising about the Child Helpline service (whether it is operational or not).



### 9.3 Where it is operational, the Child Helpline is a contributing and participating member of the Interagency Standing Committee's Cluster Coordination System

- 9.3.1 If a formal humanitarian response is launched in country, the Child Helpline participates and, to the extent appropriate, shares data with the relevant clusters.

*Indicator:* Child helplines appear on the formal member list of the relevant clusters.

Being prepared is a precondition for responding quickly and effectively to an emergency. All child helplines should have updated contingency plans related to potential emergencies (the number and type of potential emergencies will depend on the geographic location of the child helpline, socio-political climates, etc.)

Members should develop a contingency plan that clarifies the strategic and operational actions that need to be taken by the child helpline at times of emergency to remain available during such situations, including natural disasters and conflict zones. The contingency plan and subsequent actions in preparation for emergency situations, the child helplines should also consider the major implications stated above.

In emergencies in which the Interagency Standing Committee launches the Cluster Coordination System, a quality child helpline will be formally recognised and included in the emergency response.

Finally, at the onset of an emergency or during a protracted crisis, staff may need additional training and support to work support children experiencing potentially traumatic events. Partnerships with professional mental health organisations, university departments, INGOs, or other may be helpful in facilitating this additional support.

#### *Resources – Effectively and Responsibly Managed in Emergencies*

The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action [Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action](#) **Guidelines**

Child Welfare Information Gateway [Disaster Planning for Child Welfare Agencies](#) **Guideline**

Interagency Steering Committee: [IASC Guidelines on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support](#) **Guidelines, ML**

UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs: [Humanitarian Response Information](#) (search by country to access 3W/4W) **ML**