CHILD PROTECTION & SAFEGUARDING POLICY

Center for Innovations and Digital Education – Dig-Ed
Skopje, Republic of North Macedonia

1. Purpose and commitment

The Center for Innovations and Digital Education – Dig-Ed is committed to promoting and protecting the rights, safety, dignity and well-being of all children participating in or affected by the organisation's activities.

Dig-Ed recognises every child's right to protection from violence, abuse, exploitation, neglect, discrimination and other forms of harm, including risks arising from the use of digital technologies.

The organisation applies a zero-tolerance principle towards abuse, exploitation and inappropriate treatment of children and undertakes to implement preventive measures, identify risks promptly and respond appropriately to concerns or reports that a child may be at risk.

This policy sets out the principles, responsibilities and procedures for protecting children during Dig-Ed's educational, research and project activities.

2. Scope and applicability

This policy applies to all persons working or acting on behalf of Dig-Ed, including:

- Founders of the association;
- Trainers, researchers, mentors and educational experts;
- Volunteers, consultants and external collaborators;
- Representatives of partner organisations participating in activities organised by Dig-Ed.

For the purposes of this policy, a child is any person under the age of 18.

The policy applies to in-person and digital activities, including educational workshops, school activities, training, development of digital educational games, research, evaluation and online communication.

All persons covered by this policy are required to know and comply with its provisions.

3. Core principles

Best interests of the child: The safety, dignity and well-being of the child take priority in decisions affecting them.

Equality and non-discrimination: All children have an equal right to protection, regardless of sex, age, disability, ethnic origin, religious affiliation, social status or other personal characteristics.

Prevention: Potential risks to children's safety are identified and reduced before and during activities.

Participation and empowerment: Children receive age-appropriate information about their rights and are encouraged to express their views and concerns.

Confidentiality and privacy: Children's personal data and related information are protected and shared only where there is a justified and lawful need.

Accountability: Everyone acting on behalf of Dig-Ed has a duty to contribute to a safe environment and report concerns that a child may be at risk.

4. Prevention and risk management

Dig-Ed integrates child protection measures into the planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of all activities involving children.

Before activities begin, the responsible project team assesses potential physical, emotional, psychological and digital risks. The risk assessment is tailored to the nature of the activity, the age of participants and the conditions in which it takes place. It covers venue safety, necessary supervision, use of digital tools, personal data protection, accessibility and inclusion, and emergency response procedures.

Preventive measures include:

- Organising activities in safe environments with appropriate supervision;
- Cooperating with schools and their teachers and/or professional support services;
- Providing information about activities in a form children can understand;
- Obtaining the necessary consents and approvals;
- Ensuring accessibility and inclusive participation;
- Respecting privacy and protecting personal data;
- Establishing clear procedures for reporting concerns or suspicions that a child may be at risk.

Activities addressing sensitive topics, such as harassment, discrimination and gender-based violence, are designed and implemented to minimise the risk of distress, stigmatisation or exposure to inappropriate content.

When activities address sensitive topics, including cyberbullying, sexual harassment, gender-based violence and other forms of abuse, Dig-Ed uses educational materials and fictional scenarios appropriate to participants' age and maturity.

Children are not required to share personal experiences of violence or harassment and have the right to withdraw from sensitive activities without negative consequences.

Educational games, digital scenarios and other materials addressing such topics undergo appropriate expert review before being tested with children or made publicly available, to prevent exposure to distressing, discriminatory or inappropriate content.

5. Code of Conduct

All persons involved in Dig-Ed activities must behave professionally, responsibly and respectfully towards children.

They must:

- Treat all children with dignity, fairness and respect;
- Use positive, inclusive and non-discriminatory communication;
- Respect children's privacy and personal boundaries;
- Conduct activities in appropriately supervised settings;
- Report concerns about abuse or harm promptly;
- Comply with rules on safe digital communication and data protection;
- Avoid one-to-one meetings with children without appropriate supervision, except where necessary for the activity and appropriate safeguards are in place;
- Use only approved communication channels when communicating with children in project and educational activities.

The following are strictly prohibited:

- Physical, psychological, emotional or sexual violence;
- Humiliating, threatening or discriminatory behaviour;
- Inappropriate communication or behaviour towards minors;
- Private communication with children through personal social media profiles or unapproved communication channels;
- Arranging private meetings, transport or activities with children outside agreed project and educational activities without prior authorisation and appropriate safeguards;
- Sharing personal data or photographs without appropriate authorisation;
- Asking children to disclose personal experiences of violence or abuse;
- Ignoring, concealing or discouraging reports of concerns that a child may be at risk.

Breaches of the Code of Conduct may result in appropriate disciplinary or contractual measures and, where necessary, notification of the competent authorities.

6. Child safety in digital environments

Given Dig-Ed's work in digital education, particular attention is paid to protecting children when using digital technologies.

Digital activities are planned to minimise risks of cyberbullying, online harassment, manipulation, exposure to harmful content, breaches of privacy and misuse of personal information.

Dig-Ed undertakes to:

- Use appropriate and secure digital educational platforms;
- Avoid unnecessary collection of pupils' personal data;
- Apply age-appropriate privacy settings;
- Ensure supervision by authorised adults during online activities;
- Prevent unauthorised private communication between adults and children;
- Encourage responsible and respectful online behaviour;
- Assess risks associated with artificial intelligence tools, particularly regarding privacy, bias and inappropriate content.

Children's personal data or sensitive personal experiences must not be entered into publicly available generative artificial intelligence tools.

Before using digital platforms, artificial intelligence tools and educational games in activities involving children, Dig-Ed assesses their suitability in relation to participants' ages, privacy protection, content safety and potential risks of inappropriate communication or exposure to harmful content.

7. Child safeguarding responsibilities

The association's governing bodies bear overall responsibility for establishing and maintaining appropriate child protection mechanisms.

Dig-Ed appoints a designated Child Safeguarding Officer, whose responsibilities are to:

- Coordinate implementation of this policy;
- Provide guidance on child protection;
- Receive and document reports and concerns;
- Coordinate notification and referral procedures;
- Ensure confidential storage of documentation;
- Cooperate with schools, competent authorities and specialised organisations;
- Contribute to awareness-raising and staff training.

In addition to the designated Child Safeguarding Officer, Dig-Ed appoints a deputy who assumes the relevant responsibilities in cases of absence, unavailability or conflict of interest involving the designated officer.

Contact details and procedures for reporting concerns or suspected risks to a child are made available to all persons involved, participants and their parents or legal guardians. Project coordinators are responsible for integrating child protection measures into the planning and implementation of project activities.

All persons involved must comply with this policy and promptly report concerns.

If a report concerns the designated Child Safeguarding Officer, it is submitted to another designated responsible person or directly to the competent authorities, as appropriate.

8. Reporting and responding to safeguarding concerns

Any suspicion, information, report or disclosure indicating that a child may be at risk must be taken seriously.

A person receiving information about a possible risk must:

1. Prioritise the child's immediate safety and well-being.
2. Listen to the child calmly and respectfully, without asking leading questions.
3. Not promise absolute confidentiality.
4. Record relevant information accurately, using the child's own words where possible.
5. Notify the designated Child Safeguarding Officer without delay.
6. Cooperate with relevant school services and institutions in accordance with legal obligations.

Where a child is in immediate danger, emergency services or the competent child protection authorities must be contacted without delay.

Persons engaged by Dig-Ed must not independently investigate suspected abuse or attempt to determine whether reports are true.

Information is shared only with persons and institutions that have a lawful and professional basis for acting on it.

Every report or concern that a child may be at risk is documented in a record containing information about the nature of the report, the date and circumstances of the incident, actions taken, persons or institutions notified and necessary follow-up measures.

Documentation is kept confidential, with access restricted to authorised persons, in accordance with applicable personal data protection regulations. Completing the record must not delay urgent measures to protect the child.

9. Informed consent and children's participation

Dig-Ed ensures that children and their parents or legal guardians receive clear, understandable and timely information about activities in which children are expected to participate.

Where required, written consent from a parent or legal guardian is obtained before participation, together with the child's age- and maturity-appropriate assent.

Participation in voluntary research and evaluation activities must not be subject to negative consequences if a child decides not to participate.

Additional consents and appropriate safeguards are obtained for photography, video recording, interviews and publication of materials through which a child may be identified.

Educational activities must not require children to share personal experiences of violence, harassment or other sensitive situations.

10. Personal data protection and confidentiality

Dig-Ed undertakes to protect children's personal data in accordance with the applicable personal data protection regulations of the Republic of North Macedonia and relevant European requirements.

Personal data are collected only when necessary for legitimate educational, administrative or research purposes.

Appropriate technical and organisational measures are implemented to prevent unauthorised access, loss, misuse or disclosure of data.

Research and evaluation data are anonymised wherever possible. Where the use of identifiable data is necessary, access is restricted to authorised persons.

For each relevant activity, the legal basis for processing, retention periods, data subjects' rights and secure deletion procedures are determined.

Cross-border sharing of personal data takes place only where legally permitted and where appropriate safeguards are in place.

Documentation relating to reports of risks to children is stored securely and separately from routine project documentation.

11. Cooperation with schools and partner organisations

Dig-Ed carries out educational activities in cooperation with schools, universities, non-governmental organisations and other educational institutions.

Where activities involve children, Dig-Ed coordinates its safeguarding measures with the institutions hosting the activities.

Before activities begin, responsibilities are established concerning supervision, permissions, communication with parents, reporting and referral to competent services.

For activities carried out in cooperation with schools or other institutions, child protection responsibilities are agreed and documented before activities begin. Persons responsible for supervision, reporting contacts, communication arrangements with parents and emergency response procedures are identified. Cooperation with institutions does not remove Dig-Ed's responsibility to take measures within its remit and legal obligations.

Where there is a concern that a child may be at risk, Dig-Ed cooperates with teachers and professional support services in schools, competent authorities and specialised support organisations.

Partner organisations and external collaborators participating in Dig-Ed activities must comply with the agreed child protection rules.

12. Safeguarding awareness

Dig-Ed ensures that persons participating in activities with children are appropriately informed about child protection, including:

- Recognising risks and signs that a child may be at risk;
- Safe digital communication;
- Responding to disclosures of violence or abuse;
- Reporting and referral procedures;
- Personal data protection and confidentiality;
- Ethical aspects of educational research and evaluation.

Before becoming directly involved in activities with children, persons involved must be informed of their responsibilities and confirm that they will comply with them.

13. Safe recruitment and engagement

Dig-Ed applies appropriate measures for the safe selection and engagement of persons who have direct contact with children in the organisation's activities.

Depending on the nature of the engagement and the level of responsibility, measures may include verification of professional qualifications, relevant experience and references, as well as other checks where permitted or required by applicable law.

Before beginning activities with children, all persons involved are familiarised with the Child Protection & Safeguarding Policy and the Code of Conduct and confirm that they will comply with them.

Dig-Ed provides appropriate child protection information and, where necessary, additional training depending on the nature of the activities and identified risks.

14. Policy approval and effective date

This Child Protection & Safeguarding Policy enters into force upon its formal adoption by the Center for Innovations and Digital Education – Dig-Ed.

All relevant members, engaged persons and collaborators will be informed of the policy and required to comply with its provisions.

Skopje

10.10.2024

Dig-Ed president:

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