



MS 648 Child Protection Policy FAQs for Volunteers

Purpose of MS 648

The U.S. Peace Corps is committed to providing a safe and positive environment in all aspects of work with children at every post. The Peace Corps strongly supports measures to reduce the risks of child abuse and exploitation caused or perpetrated by an employee or Volunteer. MS 648 *Child Protection* outlines proper conduct while working or engaging with children during Peace Corps service or employment.

The following highlights specific Q&As for Volunteers to aid in the understanding and adherence to MS 648.

If I am still a trainee, do I have to adhere to this policy?

Yes, as a trainee you must adhere to this policy. For purposes of MS 648, the term **Volunteer** means any Peace Corps Volunteer or Trainee.

Does this apply to my personal time as well as my official work time?

Yes. As a Volunteer you represent the Peace Corps during your entire service so you must display appropriate behavior with children during both work and personal time. You are responsible 24 hours a day, 7 days a week for your personal conduct and professional performance during the duration of your service with the Peace Corps.

How do I know what is appropriate and inappropriate behavior in the presence of children in my host country?

To determine appropriate and inappropriate behavior in the presence of children in your host country, contact your host country national staff. You will receive cultural training during pre-service training, including training on child protection issues and issues that are particular to your country of service. Local Peace Corps staff are incredibly knowledgeable on cultural issues and serve as a significant cultural resource for you during your service.

Why do I have to be conscious about spending time alone with children?

To avoid any unnecessary rumors, it is recommended to have more than one adult present with a child and work in a visible space when interacting with a child. Peace Corps promotes this as a precaution for Volunteers because regardless of what is actually happening, spending alone time with children may be perceived negatively in your communities. Due to the nature of Peace Corps' work, this may be

difficult to achieve at all times; however, you should comply with this recommendation when possible and always be aware of the image you project to others when working with a child.

What if I have strong reason to believe another Volunteer is abusing a child?

If you believe another Volunteer may be abusing a child, you must report those allegations of child abuse by a Volunteer to the Peace Corps. You may report those concerns of child abuse by a Volunteer to any of the following: the Country Director or other senior staff at post, the appropriate Regional Director, the Associate Director for Safety and Security, the Associate Director for Global Operations, the Office of Inspector General, or other appropriate offices at Headquarters.

What if I have strong reason to believe a Peace Corps employee is abusing a child?

If you believe a Peace Corps employee may be abusing a child, you must report those allegations of child abuse by an employee to the Peace Corps. You may report those concerns of child abuse by an employee to any of the following: the Country Director or other senior staff at post, the appropriate Regional Director, the Associate Director for Safety and Security, the Associate Director for Global Operations, the Office of Inspector General, or other appropriate offices at Headquarters.

What if I witness child abuse in my community?

Everyone deserves to be free from violence, and it can be very distressing to witness child abuse (or other forms of abuse) in your community. If you witness such abuse, you are encouraged to reach out to your Country Director, Safety and Security Manager, Program Manager, PCMOs and/or the duty officers, who can provide you with support and guidance regarding next steps.

When one witnesses violence, it is a common response to want to report to local authorities or otherwise intervene in the situation. While you should never physically intervene in a violent situation, Peace Corps staff can go over the various options with you. You should know that in some instances, intervening could lead to unintended negative consequences for the person on whose behalf you are trying to intervene. In addition, reporting the abuse to local authorities may put you in harm's way and impact your ability to remain in your site and/or to continue service. For those reasons, you are encouraged to report what you've witnessed to Peace Corps staff before doing anything else.

Why do we have to be trained on this information?

Peace Corps takes your safety and security very seriously. As part of that responsibility, we must ensure all Volunteers are aware of what is expected of them during service and prepare them well for those expectations. The training sessions may be delivered at various points during your service; they all serve as tools for education and are designed to build your confidence in your interactions with children. Additionally, Peace Corps must ensure all appropriate measures are taken to minimize the risk of child abuse by any Peace Corps Volunteer or staff member.

Where can I go for more information?

If you would like more information on MS 648, contact your Country Director.