



## Guidance

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# SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN IN ‘WASH’

February 2019

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## Safeguarding Children

### In our WASH work

The provision of safe water and adequate sanitation facilities to communities is a key part of Save the Children's work in emergencies. However, improperly built and/or poorly maintained WASH facilities (such as latrines) have contributed to child fatalities and serious injuries in the past (commonly from the collapse of the latrine slab or the septic tank ceiling), as have death and injuries caused by water trucks, especially in crowded refugee camps. WASH facilities and distributions (including water distributions) can be locations for sexual exploitation and abuse of children, perpetrated by our staff, partners, and community members.

This document will outline some potential safeguarding risks of WASH programmes, and give you suggestions on how to manage them to ensure children are as safe as possible. It is not an exhaustive list, but may help you think through a good risk management strategy.

### Possible 'people' risks

- An unequal power dynamic between children and caregivers who need access to clean water, and NGO staff and partners who are in charge of WASH facilities, arranging water distributions or delivering water.
- Regular maintenance by unsupervised adults of WASH facilities such as showers, toilets and latrines (which children can access)
- Untrained WASH staff and volunteers who do not understand the risks of unsafe programming; or who are willing to 'cut corners' in an emergency; to finish WASH construction
- Staff who 'feel anonymous' are more likely to use physical violence to discipline children, and may be more likely to abuse children in other ways

**EXAMPLE:** Ahmad is a daily worker; and drives the water truck for Save the Children in an emergency response. Because he is responsible for giving families' enough water for a week, he has a lot of power. One day he tells a young mother to come back after the water distribution and demands sex in exchange for the water. The mother has no choice, as she needs the water for her children.

### Key things to remember

1. Staff, volunteers, partners (or any representatives) should **never be alone with a child** with whom they are working
2. **Building sites are always dangerous for children** – make sure that children are prevented to enter building sites, and that all excavations are well secured 24/7 so children cannot fall in; and that all machinery and equipment are also secured safely 24/7.
3. **Any drivers, suppliers or volunteers with direct access to our beneficiaries** (e.g. water truck drivers) must be trained on, and adhere to, our Child Safeguarding Policy
4. **Regular training** on child safeguarding, especially Safer Programming, helps staff, volunteers and contractors to think through a 'child-lens' and avoid risks
5. **Power dynamics will have an impact on your programme** – think about gender inequalities, power dynamics between NGO workers and community members & address however you can
6. **Risk management is an active, on-going process** that never stops! Don't be afraid to challenge each other to ensure children are safeguarded.

### How can we manage these risks?

- Ensure that boys and girls, women and men are consulted in a meaningful way on the WASH programme; from the design phase onwards; and have regular opportunities to provide feedback (face-to-face is often best) with any concerns
- Ensure that WASH facilities are adapted and designed for safe use by all sections of the population, including children, people with disabilities, the elderly and pregnant women (e.g. height of toilet seats, grab handles, female hygiene considerations); and feedback is acted upon
- Clearly demarcated and clearly communicated areas for boys and girls, women and men
- Child Safeguarding training for all WASH staff, especially construction workers and drivers - on reporting concerns, challenging unsafe behaviour or poor practice

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**EXAMPLE:** A latrine is built on the outskirts of a refugee camp. Behind the latrine is a large empty field, with no lighting; and no 'natural surveillance' (e.g. no families live nearby and can see/hear what's going on). A teenage girl visiting the latrine is grabbed by men hiding behind the latrine, and raped in the field.

- Reduce anonymity – always wear a Save the Children t-shirt when distributing water, and displaying photo ID when working
- Challenge any staff or volunteers who are alone, or seeking to be alone, with children. Staff should never be alone with a child with whom they are working; implement the 'minimum two adults' rule
- Support staff wellbeing and reduce stress to a manageable level – stressed, under pressure staff may not notice risky behaviour or risk factors at the WASH site; and they may not react as quickly to risks
- Train and engage staff and community members responsible for physical locations on spotting the signs of abuse, and how to report concerns (and reassure that it's safe to do so) – drivers, guards, cleaners, caretakers, distribution manager, camp leader, local elders, religious leaders

## Programme & process risks

- Remote areas of interventions/ construction sites which limited possibility of daily or regular supervision
- Delaying of supplying and dispatching of safety and construction material to sites
- An absence of appropriate WASH construction expertise within WASH team in-country
- Building latrines or similar structures with excavations under significant time pressure
- If we have responsibility for life-saving WASH facilities (e.g. Ebola waste management, WASH in health care facilities for case management), the risks automatically increase
- WASH programming through partners or funding WASH projects with limited oversight increases our risk
- Insufficient coverage to cover target population with clean water (increases risk of sexual exploitation of those who are desperate to access clean water)
- Water infrastructure that has been damaged, destroyed or poorly maintained - increases the risk of contamination

- Where we are providing a continuous supply of water there is an increased risk with the use and storage of non-piped water (e.g. water quality, safety and repair of cisterns)
- Handling of dangerous chemical for treating water (such as chlorine)
- Improper storage or guarding of supplies of iodine or chemicals for water purification



- Lack of maintenance of ongoing community management of WASH facilities
- A response that includes emergency water trucking increase the risk of death/injury in road traffic accidents and potential child abuse by drivers
- Rapid recruitment of temporary drivers for water distributions; without training or oversight
- Not considering the most marginalised children; and any barriers to accessing the WASH facilities that they may have
- Staff on WASH/construction sites do not understand positive discipline techniques and instead use physical punishment to deter children from playing on the site
- Sites for latrines or other WASH facilities do not take into account the risk of sexual exploitation and abuse while walking to/from the site.

**EXAMPLE:** Save the Children is running a programme treating water in the aftermath of a tsunami. All the local water has been contaminated. We distribute chlorine for families to treat their own water, but don't realise that some of the affected community speak a different dialect. They can't read the instructions. One family adds too much chlorine and the children drink the water and become extremely sick.

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## How can we manage these risks?

- Operations team is aware of risks and find solutions for having supervising staff on ground even in remote areas
- Supply chain team should be aware of the risks and facilitate quick purchase and delivery of safety and construction material
- Promote latrine use, especially in communities where latrines may be used as a refuse site
- Where chemicals are provided they are clearly labelled in the local language and in pictorial form as poisonous, and the community knows what to do if they are ingested.
- Ensure good quality locks/bolts are used on toilets;
- Make arrangements for rubbish collection with a local agency / municipal authorities.
- Where iodine or chemicals for water purification are provided, educate families to avoid poisoning. Check for understanding – don't assume.
- Post clear instructions in programme sites, in local languages, supported by illustrations
- Regular child safeguarding briefings on site with WASH/construction team and vetting of contractors, and work with contractors to create a code of conduct
- Create a daily tracker that all daily workers and contractors must sign when in a camp/site
- Child safety clauses should be in all contracts, with clear accountability in case of accidents
- Gender-balance your WASH team as much as possible
- Give all WASH staff and contractors regular opportunities to report concerns, without fear of losing their jobs

- Actively consider how your programme will ensure that most marginalised children can also access, and benefit from, the WASH programme

**EXAMPLE:** we are building latrines in the aftermath of an earthquake. Because these latrines are to be used longer-term, they require deep pits to be dug underneath them. The staff cover the latrine pits with wooden panels overnight but the local community remove the panels, because they need them to repair their homes. One night, after it has been raining, a child falls in the pit and drowns.

- Robust contract management with clear expectations around child safeguarding and child safety for contractors
- Agree responsibilities for cleaning of communal areas with the community committee (and local authorities if applicable). Communal sanitation facilities are well lit
- Clearly state and re-state organisational rules (the Child Safeguarding Policy, the Code of Conduct) that govern behaviour
- Clear display of child and community-friendly reporting mechanisms at WASH distribution sites, construction sites and pasted on water trucks

## Risks in the physical space

- Unmanaged or risky WASH construction site (e.g. half-finished latrines left uncovered overnight or unguarded, or pits that have insufficient or easily removable covers)
- Construction sites are inherently dangerous for children – there may be a lack of fencing/barriers around dangerous sites, materials or machines.
- Tools, equipment, debris not properly stored and/or disposed of – risk to children picking them up or playing with them
- Contractors (e.g. builders) constructing WASH facilities without sufficient expertise or a child focus (e.g. may use materials that are hazardous to children's health)
- Unmonitored, unseen or uncontrolled access by adults (staff and others) to WASH facilities designed for children (e.g. children's toilets) can increase the risk of sexual exploitation and abuse
- Unsafe or poor quality materials used for construction of WASH facilities; can lead to damage (for example, in latrines, concrete can crack or wood can rot and collapse, causing serious injury or death)

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- Proximity of WASH facilities to armed actors (including militias, police forces, armed guards) can increase protection risks
- Insufficient design or construction of WASH facilities (e.g. weak locks on shower doors) increase of abuse
- WASH facilities that are not separated for children and adults, boys and girls can – increases risk of abuse
- Poor maintenance of WASH structures can lead to injury or sickness (e.g. if a latrine pit is not de-sludged on time)

## How can we manage these risks?

- Always cover or put good fences around water tanks and partially built latrines – anything with a danger of children falling or drowning in. Remember that communities may try to remove covers/fences, especially if they need material to repair homes, so make sure it's not easily removable
- Site Safety: signage and language should accommodate cultural variations; and also consider children who cannot read (e.g. pictures)
- Ask teachers and other respected adults in the community to repeatedly tell children not to play near building sites; so that the message is clearly heard by all children
- Regular child safeguarding assessments of building sites; use a good checklist & follow up on any risks immediately
- Construct or assess WASH locations with child safeguarding in mind: No 'blind spots' near latrines or showers that potential sexual offenders could hide in; do not build latrines on the edge of woodland/unlit farmland
- Ensure that all facilities are located in the safest possible site, - especially considering any main roads. Ensure that any queues for water do not place people at risk of harm (e.g. on or near a busy road or near armed actors)
- Ensure that the locations of WASH facilities are safe, well-lit and secured by a secondary enclosure to ensure privacy (e.g. adequate and separate space for women/girls, people with disabilities)
- WASH facilities constructed with effective, opaque materials, to limit possibility for covert observation/filming of children in the facility
- Socket outlets and wiring are at least five metres away from running water outlets

- Every WASH project site has a record keeping book detailing all those entering the site (staff, visitors etc.).
- Work with the Child Safeguarding Focal Point to complete regular (surprise) spot checks on sites

More info or to feedback on this briefing: [Cat.Carter@savethechildren.org](mailto:Cat.Carter@savethechildren.org)  
[c.deola@savethechildren.org.uk](mailto:c.deola@savethechildren.org.uk)  
[ssara@savechildren.org](mailto:ssara@savechildren.org)

For Child Safeguarding support, please contact:

**Middle East:** Mubarak Maman (MEEE Regional Child Safeguarding Director) [Mubarak.Maman@savethechildren.org](mailto:Mubarak.Maman@savethechildren.org)

**West & Central Africa:** Ma-Luschka Colindres (WCA Regional Child Safeguarding Director) [Ma-Luschka.Colindres@savethechildren.org](mailto:Ma-Luschka.Colindres@savethechildren.org)

**Asia:** Menaca Calyaneratne (Asia Regional Child Safeguarding Director) [Menaca.Calyaneratne@savethechildren.org](mailto:Menaca.Calyaneratne@savethechildren.org)

**East & Southern Africa:** Latha Caleb (ESA Regional Child Safeguarding Director) [Latha.Caleb@savethechildren.org](mailto:Latha.Caleb@savethechildren.org)

**Latin America & Caribbean:** Abdiel Cabrera (LAC Regional Child Safeguarding Coordinator) [Abdiel.Cabrera@savethechildren.org](mailto:Abdiel.Cabrera@savethechildren.org)

**Global level:** Susan Grant (International Child Safeguarding Director) [Susan.Grant@savethechildren.org](mailto:Susan.Grant@savethechildren.org)