Child Protection Policy

VIOLA väkivallasta vapaaksi ry

This policy sets out the measures taken to ensure that VIOLA's staff, activities and projects do not cause harm to children or expose them to the risk of harm, violence, maltreatment or exploitation, and that concerns about children's safety are reported appropriately. VIOLA is committed to protecting all children involved in its work and activities, irrespective of their functional abilities, origin, language, religion, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation or family circumstances.

VIOLA's child protection policy and arrangements are designed to support children's safe participation and to prevent, identify, report and manage potential risks to children. Activities must not increase conflict or violence directed at a child or involving the use of a child. Children's right to assistance and protection is embedded in activities, projects, events, communications and partnerships.

VIOLA väkivallasta vapaaksi ry

VIOLA is a member organisation of the Federation of Mother and Child Homes and Shelters. It works to prevent domestic violence and supports safety in the everyday lives of children, adults, and families in different life situations. VIOLA provides guidance and advice, individual, couple and family work, professionally facilitated peer support groups, and support from volunteers. Preventive help is offered at an early stage through work that strengthens personal resources and self-esteem and supports emotional skills. VIOLA's violence-related services provide help to children and adults who have experienced violence, used violence or fear that they may use violence, as well as to those close to them. The Support Center Varjo provides help in situations involving post-separation violence and stalking. Participation in VIOLA's activities and services is voluntary.

Legal basis and scope

This policy is based on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, Finland's National Child Strategy, applicable Finnish legislation and the Non-Violent Childhood Action Plan 2026–2033. The Convention on the Rights of the Child provides a comprehensive framework for children's protection and participation. In all actions concerning children, the best interests of the child must be a primary consideration. Children have the right to participation, non-discrimination, privacy, and safe growth and development. A child means any person under the age of 18.

This policy applies to everyone working within or in cooperation with VIOLA, including staff, the Board, volunteers, trainees, experts by experience and others acting on behalf of VIOLA, as well as partners in agreed activities. It covers work with clients and groups, events, communications, research collaboration, development work and projects, and online work. The effects on children of work undertaken with adults are also taken into account.

VIOLA reviews this policy regularly to ensure that it remains consistent with current legislation, national guidance and international child safeguarding standards.

Policy, people, procedures and accountability together form a framework consistent with the Keeping Children Safe standards. Child-centred multidisciplinary cooperation is also guided by Commission Recommendation (EU) 2024/1238.

Core principles

VIOLA does not tolerate any inappropriate conduct towards children, misconduct or harm to children within or through its activities. Children must be protected as comprehensively as possible from actions that expose them to the risk of violence, maltreatment, exploitation, discrimination, injury, violations of privacy or other harm. Any unlawful, unsafe or abusive conduct towards children is prohibited. This includes physical and emotional maltreatment and conduct that shames, humiliates, belittles, discriminates against or excludes a child. Violence and bullying between children are addressed. Activities take account of the effects of seeing, hearing or being threatened with domestic violence, as well as coercive control, stalking, post-separation violence and economic abuse.

Children are heard in a manner appropriate to their age and stage of development. In accordance with the policy of the Federation of Mother and Child Homes and Shelters (ETKL), VIOLA may provide a child with guidance and advice, without commencing a formal period of support, where the child's guardian or guardians do not give permission for such work. The child's views and the effects of decisions on their safety are taken into account when assessing their best interests. Participation is safe and voluntary. Children are not required to disclose their experiences of violence and may take a break or end their participation. Changes in the child's well-being during the work are measured, and the child provides feedback on how well the support has met their needs. The guardian's consent to the work, the child's own willingness to participate, accessibility and follow-up support are ensured. In the case of a young person approaching adulthood, account is taken of their independent right to be heard and to act in matters concerning them, and of the possibility of being heard despite any objection from their guardian.

Children and young people may participate voluntarily in developing activities, and their experiences are made visible.

Safer recruitment and criminal background checks

VIOLA assesses the suitability of individuals for roles involving work with children. Recruitment includes verifying identity, the qualifications required for the role and professional authorisation, discussing child protection during the interview, and checking references in the agreed manner. Criminal background checks are carried out for roles where required and permitted by applicable law. Act 504/2002 applies to employees and Act 148/2014 to volunteers. Responsibility for checks on trainees is agreed with the educational institution. The checking procedures of partners and service providers are verified in accordance with their respective responsibilities.

A criminal record extract must be no more than six months old. No copy of the extract is made, and information on criminal convictions is not stored. Required checks and induction are completed before any unsupervised contact with children. A background check does not replace supervision, training, or responding to concerns.

Boundaries of conduct, induction and training

Everyone acting on behalf of VIOLA must treat children appropriately. Age-appropriate rules on respect for others, personal integrity and privacy are agreed with children. Adults are responsible for intervening and supporting all parties involved. Everyone acting on behalf of VIOLA receives induction and commits to the code of conduct. Induction covers identifying risks, reporting concerns, and responding to them. Competence is maintained through regular training, and VIOLA undertakes to inform staff, members of the board and volunteers regularly about this child protection policy, including reporting procedures, responsible conduct and appropriate responses to concerns.

Power associated with adulthood, authority, or a position of trust must not be misused. Sexual or romantic relationships with a child participating in activities, secret meetings, private social media contacts, and requiring a child to keep secrets are prohibited. Invoking the child's initiative or presumed consent does not remove this prohibition. Physical contact must respect the child's needs, agreement, and boundaries. Gifts and payments must be agreed and transparent.

Safe practices and partnerships

Risks to children's safety are assessed before activities begin and whenever circumstances change. The assessment covers premises, supervision, one-to-one meetings, demands placed on children, accessibility, the online environment, and data protection. As a rule, groups have two adults who have completed induction; the safety of individual meetings and access to help are ensured. Arrangements for outings, transport, overnight stays and handing children over to another person are agreed separately. The whereabouts of the child and of a person close to them who is safe for the child are protected, and a safe method of communication is agreed.

In situations involving domestic violence, particularly post-separation violence and stalking, each child's safety is assessed individually and, where necessary, repeatedly.

Risk assessment and management take a child-centred approach. This includes ensuring that contact with the child and their parent or parents, or the time and place of meetings, does not unnecessarily reveal the whereabouts of the child or a person close to them who is safe for the child, or the fact that they are seeking help. In VIOLA's work, risk assessment concerning a child also includes strengthening protective factors for that child.

When taking measures to safeguard a child, opportunities for multidisciplinary cooperation with public authorities and non-governmental organisations are explored and assessed.

Child protection is incorporated into the planning, budgeting and procurement of VIOLA's activities. The safeguarding practices of partners working with children are checked, and responsibilities and arrangements for reporting concerns are agreed before cooperation begins. Activities involving a significant unmanaged risk must not be started or continued.

Online work, digital safety, images, recordings and personal data

The safeguarding principles also apply to chat services, social media, online events, and electronic communications. Only work channels approved by VIOLA may be used for these purposes. Special attention is paid to privacy, inappropriate contact, online harassment, and exploitation.

Appropriate safety and consent practices are followed whenever children are photographed, audio or audiovisual recordings are made of them, or they are depicted in any other way. Permission does not authorise publication that compromises safety. Interviews and reporting must respect both confidentiality and children's rights to have their views taken into account and to be heard. All personal data collected from or concerning children is appropriately protected.

Personal data concerning children are processed in accordance with the principle of necessity, on an appropriate legal basis and in compliance with data protection legislation. Access rights and retention periods are defined in internal guidelines. Children are provided with privacy information that they can understand. When informing guardians, involving them in the work or disclosing information, the child's best interests, applicable legal obligations and any safety risks are always assessed.

Children must not be made responsible for managing the exchange of information or safety arrangements between the guardians.

Personal data must not be entered into publicly accessible AI services.

Response and reporting procedures

VIOLA responds without delay to concerns about a child's safety, regardless of whether the suspected inappropriate conduct, violence or maltreatment has occurred within VIOLA's activities or elsewhere, such as at home, at school, during leisure activities or online. These procedures apply both to situations observed in VIOLA's activities and to concerns raised by a child or another person. A child or an adult may report a safety concern, inappropriate conduct or a near miss without certainty or evidence of what has happened. Concerns may be raised verbally or in writing with the child's or adult's own worker at VIOLA or with any member of staff. Children are helped to report concerns and may be accompanied by a safe adult for support.

In all situations, the child's immediate safety is assessed, the necessary support is arranged, and reports required by law are made to the authorities. Employees have a duty to notify child welfare authorities under section 25 of the Child Welfare Act and, where the statutory conditions are met, a duty to report suspected offences to the police. If a concern relates to a person acting on behalf of VIOLA or to the safety of its activities, the matter is also handled under the organisation's internal procedure free from conflicts of interest. Where a concern relates to maltreatment occurring elsewhere, VIOLA makes a child welfare notification where necessary and cooperates with the authorities and other support providers within the scope of its role.

When a concern arises, proceed as follows:

1. Listen calmly to the child's concern and assess safety

If the child is in immediate danger, call 112 and arrange urgent help. Listen calmly, without blaming the child or asking leading questions. Take the child's account and experiences seriously. Explain to the child, in a way they can understand, what information must be shared and with whom, in order to arrange help.

2. Record what you have heard and ensure reports are made to the authorities

Promptly record relevant observations, the child's spontaneous account as close to their exact words as possible, and the safeguarding measures taken by VIOLA. Store the information securely.

Make the statutory child welfare notification and, where necessary, a report to the police without delay when the relevant conditions are met. In the report, distinguish the child's own account from the worker's observations and interpretations. The duty to report is personal. A statutory report does not require a guardian's consent or a supervisor's permission. Internal reporting, handling of the matter or consultation does not replace reports to the authorities and must not delay them. Where necessary, consult the association's designated responsible persons who have no conflict of interest about the child's situation.

3. Ensure safe follow-up

If the suspicion concerns a guardian or another person close to the child, agree with child welfare services and, where necessary, the police on when and by whom that person will be informed, before informing them.

If the suspicion concerns VIOLA's staff or a person acting on its behalf, the person responsible for management or a Board representative with no conflict of interest ensures that the necessary safety measures are taken. Contact with children is restricted where necessary and in accordance with the law. The

matter is handled without conflicts of interest and with due regard to the legal rights of all parties. A breach may lead to changes in duties, termination of cooperation, or other lawful measures. A person who reports a concern in good faith must not be punished, pressured, or discriminated against.

4. Arrange support and monitor safety

The Executive Director and/or the child safeguarding contact person, together with the worker supporting the child, ensures that the child receives the necessary support regardless of the outcome of the inquiry. Cooperation is arranged according to the child's needs with child welfare services, social and health services, school or early childhood education and care services, the police and other support providers. Agreement is reached on VIOLA's contact person, the body coordinating the overall response, and arrangements for monitoring the receipt of help and the child's safety. The child must not be required to repeat their experiences unnecessarily.

Responsibilities, monitoring and policy review

The Executive Director is responsible for implementing, monitoring, and regularly reviewing this policy. The Executive Director may appoint a child safeguarding contact person to support implementation, advice, training and reporting procedures.

The Board approves the policy, ensures that resources are available, and oversees its implementation. The Executive Director, who is responsible for implementation, ensures that recruitment, training, and agreed procedures are carried out. The appointed child safeguarding contact person provides advice, receives concerns and monitors safety measures. Everyone acting on behalf of VIOLA is responsible for following the procedures and reporting concerns.

Implementation is assessed internally at least annually. Feedback from children and those close to them are taken into account in the assessment. The policy is also reviewed following significant changes in legislation, activities, or the organisation. Operational guidance and forms support implementation. The approved document is published on the website and communicated accessibly to staff, children, guardians, and partners.

Date of preparation: 23 October 2026

Date of approval and Board decision: 28 October 2026

Effective date: Immediately

Next internal assessment: Autumn 2027

Legislation, regulations and conventions used in preparing this policy

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child; National Child Strategy; Keeping Children Safe standards; Commission Recommendation (EU) 2024/1238; Child Welfare Act 417/2007; Acts 504/2002 and 148/2014; EU General Data Protection Regulation and Data Protection Act 1050/2018; and other Finnish legislation applicable to the activities.