

The Mannerheim League for Child Welfare

Child Protection Policy

Introduction

[The Mannerheim League for Child Welfare](#) (MLL) is a non-governmental organization and membership is open to everyone. The organization promotes the well-being and participation of children and their families, increases respect for and visibility of childhood, and ensures that children's views are taken into account in public decision-making.

Being the largest child welfare organization in Finland, MLL has 71 000 members and 532 local associations throughout the country. The work of these local associations is supported by MLL's 9 district organizations.

MLL relies on partnerships and works with numerous organizations, businesses, and networks in Finland and abroad. MLL's Central Organization in Helsinki cooperates closely with ministries, officials, and other organizations while the district organizations and local associations operate on the regional level.

MLL aims to ensure that

- children are equal members of society
- every child can enjoy good and happy surroundings
- parenting and education are respected and supported
- volunteer work, helping, caring and joint responsibility will increase

The Child Protection Policy

MLL's Child Protection Policy has been developed to ensure and guarantee that no harm comes to children when they participate in MLL's activities or projects. MLL is committed to equally protecting all children participating in its activities. In the Child Protection Policy, a child refers to anyone under the age of 18.

MLL is aware of the potential risks that may arise for children and young people when they take part in activities organized for them. By conducting risk assessments, we strive to minimize these risks in every way.

MLL's work is based on a human rights approach, with a particular focus on respecting and promoting children's rights. MLL aims to act in an ethically sustainable and transparent manner. MLL is strategically committed to valuing childhood and children as individuals, as well as promoting solidarity, humanity, and equality.

Code of Conduct for Protecting Children in MLL's Activities and Events

1. MLL's Code of Conduct for Staff and Participants in MLL's Activities

MLL takes all necessary measures to prevent harmful or unsafe situations for children in its activities and events, and will promptly address any such situations if they arise. MLL will never ignore reports of actual or alleged misconduct against children but will respond by its Code of Conduct, regardless of the nature of the report, who the allegations concern, who makes the report, or their background. However, as a non-governmental organization and not an authority, MLL's responsibilities do not include tasks that belong to official bodies such as child protection or law enforcement authorities.

This Code of Conduct provides guidelines on appropriate and ethical behavior of adults towards children, as well as on interactions between children. It has been developed in accordance by the principle and obligation of prioritizing the best interests of the child. MLL aims to ensure that both children and adults can participate in MLL's activities and events safely and with confidence.

2. Principles of Action

MLL is committed to the following principles, which aim to protect children in MLL's activities and promote the realization of their rights:

- ✓ The purpose of MLL's activities is to promote children's rights. All activities and events respect children's rights and aim to create the fullest possible conditions for their realization. In all actions taken by MLL, the best interests of the child are always the primary consideration.
- ✓ Every child is treated with respect, regardless of their gender, nationality or ethnic origin, religious or political beliefs, age, physical or mental health, disability, sexual orientation and gender identity, family background, socioeconomic and cultural background, or any other personal characteristic. Each child is valued as an individual.
- ✓ Any illegal, unsafe, or abusive behavior towards children is strictly prohibited.
- ✓ MLL recognizes every child's right to protection from all forms of physical and mental violence, harm and abuse, neglect, indifference, mistreatment, or exploitation, including sexual abuse. MLL strives to actively promote this right within society as well.
- ✓ Children are not a homogeneous group but individuals, and children's groups are diverse. MLL aims to take into account the diversity of children and the effects of different life situations and environments on their circumstances.
- ✓ MLL acknowledges what constitutes inappropriate treatment of children. MLL's staff and volunteers are familiar with the guidelines for preventing and addressing inappropriate behavior.
- ✓ MLL trains its staff and volunteers to recognize signs of child abuse or inappropriate treatment and to report any suspicious observations immediately to the relevant authorities.
- ✓ MLL systematically checks the criminal background of volunteers working with minors. MLL has specific guidelines for conducting these background checks.
- ✓ MLL has ethical guidelines and principles for digital environments that promote respectful, responsible, and safe online behavior. These guidelines ensure that children are not exposed to content or behavior that is inappropriate for their age.
- ✓ In its activities, MLL aims to raise children's and young people's awareness of children's rights. Content produced for children and young people strives to take into account children from diverse backgrounds whenever possible. The content for children is designed to be accessible and presented in a way that is appropriate for their age and developmental level.



- ✓ The collection and use of children's data within MLL comply with the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) ([EU] 2016/679) and supplementary national data protection legislation. The confidentiality of children's personal information is always respected.
- ✓ MLL's advocacy and research activities are based on appropriate and impartial knowledge regarding children's well-being, and its operations are conducted in an ethically sustainable manner.
- ✓ In studies conducted within the organization, MLL follows the ethical guidelines of the National Advisory Board on Research Ethics and other relevant research ethics bodies concerning ethical pre-assessment and good scientific practice.
- ✓ MLL recognizes children as active agents. MLL listens to children and young people and incorporates their views into its work. MLL actively develops opportunities for children to influence, plan, participate in activities, and be involved in decision-making regarding their own lives and environment.
- ✓ MLL encourages children to express their opinions and respects their perspectives.
- ✓ MLL emphasizes voluntary participation for children, ensuring they always have the right to decline or discontinue their participation at any time. Children also have the right to take part in ways that align with their abilities and resources.
- ✓ MLL considers it important that children are spoken to in a way they can understand. Information about participation is also provided in a manner that is accessible to them.
- ✓ MLL has developed guidelines and documented practices for its staff and volunteers to ensure and promote children's protection and other rights. MLL will continue to develop, update, and raise awareness of these guidelines across the entire organization.
- ✓ Everyone working with children at MLL's events or activities must accept and adhere to MLL's Code of Conduct.
- ✓ MLL regularly monitors and supervises its activities and the adherence to the Code of Conduct.

3. Guidelines for Adults and Children to Create a Safer Space

At MLL, we follow the principles of creating a safer space. This means fostering inclusion and equality so that everyone is seen and accepted as they are, without fear of discrimination or harassment. Our goal is for MLL to be a community where everyone feels safe to participate in activities, training, and events.

Recognize your assumptions. Respect each person's right to self-identification. Try not to assume someone's gender, background, or opinions. Pause before making quick interpretations and consider alternative perspectives. Be mindful of your language choices and recognize human diversity.

Show respect. Respect other people's experiences. Be aware of your role and position in different situations. Be actively present and contribute to an inclusive atmosphere that allows others to participate. Ensure that taking photos is acceptable to everyone involved. Avoid commenting on appearances, gossiping, or reinforcing stereotypes.

Listen and learn. Treat every person, situation, and encounter as an opportunity to learn and grow. Be open to feedback and new perspectives. Ensure that everyone has the chance to express their views. Speak in a way that is understandable to people outside your reference group.

Intervene and take action. If you witness harassment or inappropriate behavior, address it in a way that feels comfortable for you. By stepping in, you set an example for others. Everyone is responsible for their own words and actions.

Practice humanity. If you have hurt someone, intentionally or unintentionally, take responsibility and apologize. When someone apologizes to you, be open to forgiveness. Reflect critically on your actions and strive to improve. Mistakes and questions are allowed – no one is expected to know or get everything right immediately!

Create a positive and joyful atmosphere. Take responsibility for ensuring a welcoming environment for others. Listen, give compliments, and encourage those around you. Celebrate and share joy!

4. Sustainable Development

MLL's sustainability and responsibility program provides guidelines for promoting and implementing sustainability and responsibility in MLL's activities. MLL promotes sustainable development by acting as a responsible organizational operator. This contains building participation, inclusion and trust in society and communities, advocating for child rights, and enhancing well-being:

A Responsible Organizational Operator

- ✓ MLL adheres to good and responsible governance practices and promotes well-being in work communities. It highlights socially, culturally, ecologically, and economically sustainable solutions for children, young people, and families. MLL uses resources wisely and considers environmental impact in its decisions. MLL's operations aim to address climate change and promote biodiversity. Mitigating climate change and ensuring biodiversity are fundamental prerequisites for fulfilling children's rights. Efforts are made to ensure that activities do not hinder climate or biodiversity goals.

A Builder of Participation, Inclusion, and Trust

- ✓ MLL strengthens social capital and resilience. It provides diverse opportunities for children, young people, and adults to participate. MLL builds safe communities for children, young people, and parents and works to prevent loneliness. MLL's activities are accessible to all with a low threshold for participation. The diversity of families is taken into account, and the goal is to ensure that children, young people, and families can actively engage in developing and promoting issues important to them while having opportunities for meaningful interactions and partnerships.

A Promoter of Well-being

- ✓ MLL engages in child and youth work. Supporting parents and parenthood is important while promoting the mental well-being of children and young people. MLL's diverse activities strengthen family support and help prevent the accumulation of everyday challenges.

An Advocate for Child Rights



- ✓ MLL conducts advocacy work to promote children's rights, targeting decision-making at the state, municipal, and regional levels. To make this happen, MLL provides training, coaching, and other support within its organizational network as well as externally.

Responsibility and Monitoring

MLL's Suunta 2026 is the strategic plan for the organizational network for the 2024–2026 period. MLL's strategy defines the measures needed to address the challenges of an ever-changing operational environment. The strategy is re-evaluated every three years, including the Child Protection Policy.

MLL monitors the implementation of its Child Protection Policy and Code of Conduct. Monitoring includes offering all participants in MLL's activities and events the opportunity to provide informal feedback, which is also systematically collected during events. The feedback provides valuable insights for improving operations. Reports on the feedback are shared with the management team and staff and are considered in the development and planning of MLL's operations, guidelines, and event organization.

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The Mannerheim League for Child Welfare