**Suggested Guidelines for Police in Protecting Children during Covid 19**

Police department is playing exemplary and critical role in the implementation of lockdown guidelines, identification and rescue of vulnerable women and children, ensuring safe places for migrant workers and their children.

It is in this context, the present guidelines are developed for the Police Department in ensuring safety of children, particularly girls.

**1.Rescue and Rehabilitation of Children in Street Situations**

Police in most cases will be the first contact in the identification, rescue and rehabilitation of children in street situation.

When police come across street children, they can probe on whether they are unaccompanied or separated, or have families also living close by.

* If they have families and these families have access to a safe shelter and basic services, they can be repatriated to the family. Due information is to be provided to CWC
* If they are found unaccompanied, they can be handed over to CWC or DCPU or nearest child care home/social welfare department official for handing them over to CWC for further action.
* In all these situations, in addition to CWC and DCPUs, organizations working with children in street situations can be contacted, and Police is encouraged to become familiar with these. CHILDLINE 1098 can also be contacted for cases with accute protection needs.

**2. Rescue and Rehabilitation of Children of Migrant Workers and Unaccompanied Adolescent Workers**

Large number of migrants from other districts and states are being provided shelter and food in camps, others have sought refuge in empty buildings or in other locations. Some children are with families, or with other relatives (separated children), or alone (unaccompanied children). Priority interventions are:

* Identify children who are unaccompanied and immediately link them up to CHILDLINE (1098) or CWC/DCPU.
* Report to relevant institutions/departments (of Woman and Child Development, Health), if food and nutrition, water, or other basic services are missing, for action.

**3. In the case of quarantine camps, Police can ensure that the safety and protection of children in these camps is ensured including issues such as:**

* Ensure that children stay together with their parent, relatives or other caregivers.
* Ensure that areas used by children and adolescents are safe and can be constantly monitored.
* To ensure that that appropriate documentation is completed for all women and children in the camps and provided to relevant district authorities
* Ensure that information about 1098 and other key phones are displayed and known to all. If possible, positive messages about prevention messages from protection, from COVID, can be displayed.
* Ensure that there is adequate lighting in the common areas (such as court yards, yards, entrance…)

**Safety of children affected by Covid 19 and in quarantine/ isolation**

* Special care needs to be taken on the safety and protection of children, specially those in quarantine, isolation, and/or undergoing treatment COVID19. It is essential to design care and protection services to children whose parents are undergoing Covid treatement. Services for children could include the following:
1. Psychosocial Support services
2. Food
3. Play and relaxation aspects
4. Hygiene services
* Linkages to CHLIDLINE, services to psychologists to provide psychosocial care to need children are to be ensured. If there are protection concerns, CWC and DCPU should be contacted. Child-friendly services are to be linked in convergence with local medical teams, and special protocols for handling children should be put in place. Safety and protection in isolation wards to be ensured. No child should be subjected to stigmatized words in the context of testing Covid positive.

**Other issues Police should provide oversight on:**

* Ensure that the latrines, washing, and bathing areas have sufficient privacy and security for women, children and adolescents,
* Ensure safe measures are put in place for persons living with disabilities.
* Ensure that special care needs to be taken on adolescent girls including linkages to Menstrual Hygiene Management services, Necessary protocols on inter-state migration need to be followed. .

**4. Covid 19 and Violence Prevention**

* In quarantine and other camps, provide a safe emergency space with a trained professional that women and children can access if they face violence, sexual harassment or abuse.
* Assign one manager in the quarantine center to be in charge of receiving reports on violence sexual harassment and abuse from women and children. Ensure the manager is trained on receiving complaints using confidential and survivor-centred approaches, including understanding referral and protection mechanisms to be put in place.
* Ensure that individuals who report sexual exploitation or abuse are referred to specialized service providers working to support victims of violence for further follow-up and support.
* Any cases of gender based violence and child sexual abuse (POCSO) needs to be taken up immediately by police and ensuring the safety and protection of victims.
* The police can also play a key role in raising awareness on this along with their role in creating awareness about Covid 19 risks.
1. **Awarness on ChildLine Services and on Psychosocial Services to vulnerable children**
* Police during their mohalla, slum, basti , village law and order visits, mike announcements, can generate awareness on CHILDLINE 1098r 1098, for children to call in case of any harassment, abuse, violence at their houses and neighborhood areas.
* Police should request from DCPU a list of the other referral services for counselling and the contact numbers which can be circulated in the community outreach as well as in quarantine centres.

1. **Implementation of Supreme Court Guidelines dated 03 April 2020 on child protection in the context of Covid**

On 3rd April, 2020, a two judge bench of the Hon’ble Supreme Court of India, issued an order on the necessary steps to be taken to protect children who are in the care of the State from Covid 19. Judgement link as follows:

<https://main.sci.gov.in/supremecourt/2020/10820/10820_2020_0_4_21584_Order_03-Apr-2020.pdf>

* A key role for police in this is on bail of children in conflict with law. The Supreme Court order clearly asks for bails to be prioritized to reduce over crowding in institutions. Also considering the importance of this, the production of children to JJBs can also be reduced by Police using diversion methods in the best interest of children.
* The Police also have a support role in helping the other institutions like CWC, JJB and CCIs to also be able to perform their functions to protection children through adequate support as and when required.
* Police can also play an oversight role to ensure CCIs are functioning well and have adequate supplies of essential goods and support them to get these as well.
1. **Other child protection concerns for Police to be aware of:**

Covid 19 can enhance many other vulnerabilities of children due to economic stress of families and the migration crisis which has led to huge movements of population in distress. Some of these the Police need to be cognizant of to prevent:

* An increase in incidences of child labour and trafficking for labour or sexual exploitation. It is important to keep a track on these and be more vigilant
* Missing children – to track if there is an increase in reporting of missing children during and post lockdown and accord these cases highest priority through immediate registration of FIRs and necessary investigation
* Increase in child marriages is anticipated. Police need to be vigilant through community policing initiatives and take immediate action
* Prevention messages can also be spread by Police in their community contact
* Police can also make sure they flag any concerns in areas they patrol to required district authorities if any of these risks are noticed.