



Child Online Harm & Mandatory Reporting Guide



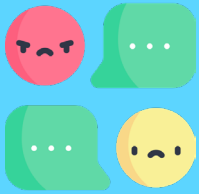


Introduction

This guide adapts existing child protection and mandatory reporting frameworks to the African context. It is designed for children, parents, caregivers, educators, institutions, and community leaders. It reflects African realities, laws, and cultural practices, and aligns with international standards, including the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (1990), the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), and relevant national laws.

Commitment to Children and Young People

African States, communities, and institutions recognise that children are central to the future and must be protected from all forms of harm. Commitments are enshrined in the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (1990) and national child rights legislation, such as Nigeria's Child Rights Act 2003, South Africa's Children's Act 2005, and Kenya's Children Act 2022.



Meaning of child online harm

Child online harm refers to any form of risk, abuse, or exploitation that children face in digital environments, including the internet, social media, online games, messaging platforms, or emerging technologies such as Artificial Intelligence (AI) and the metaverse. It encompasses both direct harms (where a child is targeted or exploited) and indirect harms (where a child is exposed to harmful content, manipulative systems, or unsafe online practices).

Thus, child online harm undermines a child's safety, privacy, dignity, mental health, and development, violating their rights as protected under international conventions such as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Examples of child online harm



- Cyberbullying across social media, messaging applications, and gaming platforms.
- Online grooming by predators seeking to exploit children sexually.
- Sextortion, where children are coerced into producing sexual content under threat.
- Exposure to and circulation of child sexual abuse material, including AI-generated content.
- Online radicalisation and exposure to violent extremist propaganda.
- Psychological harm from social comparison content, particularly regarding beauty and body image.
- Addiction to social media and online gaming, leading to mental health difficulties.
- Online hate speech and discrimination targeting children based on identity or background.

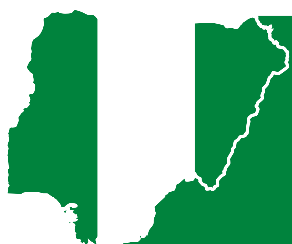


- Illegal streaming and dissemination of abusive content on the dark web.
- Non-consensual sharing of intimate images (including revenge pornography involving minors).
- Recruitment for trafficking using social media and online chat platforms.
- Exposure to harmful health-related content, including material promoting self-harm or eating disorders.
- Manipulative algorithms that push harmful content towards children.
- Privacy breaches through unauthorised data collection and online surveillance.
- Involvement in or exposure to online gambling and inappropriate digital advertising.
- Promotion of harmful traditional practices facilitated online (e.g., Female Genital Mutilation).
- Deepfake technology used to create fabricated abusive content involving children.
- Coercion into live-streamed abuse or participation in criminal acts.
- Increased use of Artificial Intelligence by offenders to create or distribute abusive material.
- Manipulation of children into engaging in illegal activities online.

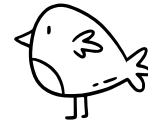
Mandatory and Voluntary Reporting Duties

Mandatory reporting requirements are an essential safeguard for protecting children from abuse, neglect, and online exploitation. While these obligations differ across African countries, the central principle is consistent: children's safety must always come first.

Country-Specific Legal Obligations



Nigeria: Under the Child Rights Act 2003, teachers, health professionals, and other designated persons are legally obliged to report cases of suspected child abuse.



South Africa: The Children's Act 2005 requires professionals such as teachers, social workers, and health workers to report any suspicions of child abuse to either the police or the Department of Social Development.



Kenya: The Children Act 2022 sets out clear reporting duties for individuals and organisations working with children.

Where No Specific Statute Exists

In countries without dedicated child protection reporting laws, professionals and community members still carry a moral and ethical responsibility to report suspected harm. Reports should be escalated promptly to:

- National child protection agencies
- The police
- Trusted non-governmental organisations (NGOs) working in child protection

Core Reporting Principle

Regardless of jurisdiction, all reports must prioritise the child's immediate safety and well-being. Delays or failure to report can place children at further risk of harm.

Handling a Disclosure (Practical guide)

1. Immediate command- (first 60 minutes)



Stay calm and give your full attention. Drop other tasks; sit to be less intimidating.



Listen and reassure. Use short, open, non-judgemental phrases: "Thank you for telling me." "I'm glad you told me."



Record the child's words verbatim (see template below) as soon as it's possible and safe to do so. Include time, location, and any physical signs.



Explain the limits of confidentiality clearly and simply: "I can't keep this secret, I must tell people who can keep you safe."

2. What to say (short, age-adjusted scripts)

For young children (3–7 years):

- "Thank you for telling me. You did the right thing. Can you tell me what happened?"
- If they start giving details: "I'm going to write down your words so I don't forget them."

For older children (8–13 years):

- "I am glad you told me. That must be hard. I need to tell my safeguarding lead so they can help keep you safe. Is there anything you are worried about now?"

For teenagers (14+):

- "Thanks for telling me, I believe you. I can not promise to keep this to myself, but I will only tell the people who need to know to help you. Would you like someone you trust to be with you now?"

Key phrasing to avoid: "Are you sure?" "Why didn't you tell anyone before?" "Did that happen to you?" (leading). Avoid promising secrecy: **never say "I won't tell anyone."**



3. What NOT to do (explicit 'do not's')

- Do not ask leading or suggestive questions (e.g., "Did X touch you?").
- Do not conduct an investigative interview or try to get a full account; preserve the child's words.
- Do not make promises of confidentiality.
- Do not accuse or confront alleged perpetrators yourself (this can endanger the child and compromise investigations).
- Do not delay recording. Even if you must speak first, write an exact contemporaneous record immediately afterwards.

Reporting Channels

Nigeria

The Nigeria Police Force - National Cybercrime Centre (**NPF-NCC**) serves as the nation's hub for preventing, investigating, and prosecuting cyber and cyber-enabled crimes through advanced forensics and intelligence expertise.

(Contact Information WhatsApp Number: +2349168343710 Email Address support@nccc.npf.gov.ng Phone number: +2349168343711 Website: <https://nccc.npf.gov.ng/>)

National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) plays a critical role in safeguarding children from exploitation, including those risks emerging in the digital space. Beyond its traditional mandate of combating human trafficking, the agency has expanded its focus to address technology-enabled crimes such as online grooming, child sexual exploitation, cyber-pornography, and trafficking networks that operate through the internet.

(Contact information- Address: No. 2028, Dalaba Street, Wuse Zone 5, FCT Abuja. Phone number: +(234) 703-0000 203, Email Address: info@naptip.gov.ng)

Zimbabwe

Childline Zimbabwe is a voluntary organisation that aims to promote the protection of children in Zimbabwe through the provision of safe, confidential reporting and support mechanisms.

(Contact us Phone number: 116, E-mail Address : 116@childline.org.zw , Website: <https://www.childline.org.zw/>)

Malawi

Malawi Tithandizane Helpline (Contact email :executive@yoneco.org.mw Number 116 , Website:<https://tithandizanehelpline.org/>)

Mozambique

Mozambique Linha Fala Criança (Contact: +258 87 63 89 023 +25882 29 25 500, Toll free Number 116, Website: <https://linhafala.org.mz/>)

Namibia

Lifeline/Childline Namibia (Contact email :info@lifeline.org.na, Toll free Number: 116 Phone number: +264 61 226 889 , Website: <https://www.lifelinechildline.org.na/>)

South Africa

Childline South Africa (Contact email :olcadmin@childlinesa.org.za, Toll free Number: 116 Phone number: (+27)-(0)31-201 2059, Website:<https://www.childlinesa.org.za/>)

Botswana

Childline Botswana (Contact email :info@childlinebotswana.org, Toll free Number: 1(+267) 0800 300 900 , Website:<https://childlinebotswana.org/>)

ESwatini

Swatini Action Group Against Abuse (SWAGAA) (Contact email :communications@swagaa.org.sz, Toll free Number: (+268)25052899 (+268)25057514, Website:<https://www.swagaa.org.sz/>)

Kenya

Childline Kenya (Contact email :116@childlinekenya.co.ke, Toll free Number: 116 Phone number : 0724555251 / 0732263554, WhatsApp contact: +254722116116 Website:<https://www.childlinekenya.co.ke/>)

Required Information Required When Reporting

- Child's full name, age, and location
- Nature of the harm or risk
- Details of the suspected perpetrator (if known)
- Evidence preserved (screenshots, photos, chat logs).
- Reporter's details (optional in anonymous hotlines)
- Any immediate safety concerns

Verbatim-recording template

Use this exact form to keep consistency and legal clarity.

Incident / Disclosure Record

Date: _____ Time disclosure started: _____

Location (where disclosure happened): _____

Child's name: _____ DOB / Age: _____

Person taking report: Name & role: _____

Exact words used by child (verbatim – use quotation marks): _____

Body language / visible injuries / signs (describe factually): _____

Any questions you asked (brief): _____

Any witnesses present: _____

Immediate action taken (e.g., emergency services called, child moved to safe space):

Name of safeguarding lead notified: _____ Date/time notified: _____

Next planned action / follow-up: _____

Signature of staff member & date