



Inclusion Finland, KVTL

Child Protection Policy

Introduction

Inclusion Finland (KVTL) is a non-governmental organization (NGO) for people with intellectual disability and their families and loved ones. KVTL works to support their life now and support their rights for a better future. KVTL is the voice for intellectually disabled people in Finland and a human rights and civic organization – the largest operator in this field in Finland.

KVTL works for everyone who needs support in understanding, learning and everyday life, people living with a rare or genetic disability or illness, severely disabled people who need the help of a functional aid and another person, and their families and loved ones.

Peer support and social influence are the core of KVTL's activities. Its member associations work as the bond between people with intellectual disability – children, the young, and adults – and their families, and protect their rights.

KVTL provides information on rights, services and social security. It organizes and coordinates national and local events.

As the biggest civic organization focusing on intellectual disability, 14 000 members are the voice of the organization.

KVTL's network

KVTL's network includes over 130 local associations, through which we can reach people all over Finland. The activities of the local associations are mainly based on volunteer efforts. Only a few member associations also work as service providers. The foundations for KVTL's work are members' experiences and a staff of over 50 professionals.

KVTL member associations also include national associations for rare intellectual disability groups, and the We For Ourselves association, which is organized by the intellectually disabled themselves. We For Ourselves is an active movement of the intellectually disabled, consisting of over 1,000 members. The association is organized as an independent member association of KVTL.

KVTL is a member of Inclusion Europe and Inclusion International. KVTL is also a member of EURORDIS and it is included in the European ERN-Ithaca knowledge network for rare diseases.

The Norio Centre of Rare Diseases was integrated as part of KVTL operations in 2019. Norio provides services for children and adults with rare and genetic diseases, as well as for their families and professionals working with them.

KVTL's aim is

- to safeguard the inclusion and fundamental and human rights of people with intellectual disabilities, and

- to provide the necessary support for their families.

The foundation of KVTL's work lies in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, ratified by Finland on 10 June 2016. The convention guarantees that everyone has the equal right

- to inclusion in all aspects of life, at all stages of life – in early childhood education, school, in further studies, in working life, in housing, and in relationships,
- to make their own decisions and to be heard in matters concerning them,
- to knowledge and self-expression, and the right to receive the necessary support for communication, and
- to individual services according to their needs.

Inclusion Finland KVTL in a nutshell

- Established in 1961.
- We promote the inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities in all aspect of life, such as housing, education, working life, and free time.
- We influence legislation, decision-makers, experts, and general attitudes.
- We give advice on legal matters regarding services and support.
- We organize meetings, training, courses, and events for people with intellectual disabilities, their families and loved ones, and people working in the field.
- We publish guides and brochures both in print and online.
- We develop volunteer work and peer activities.
- We organize functional aid training and offer the opportunity to test aids without diagnostical borders.
- We give out grants supporting inclusion for individual persons and groups.

The Child Protection Policy

KVTL's Child Protection Policy has been developed to ensure and guarantee that no harm comes to children when they participate in KVTL's activities or projects. KVTL 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.

KVTL is aware of the potential risks that may arise for children and young people, and in particular vulnerable children and young people with disabilities, when they take part in activities organized for them. By conducting risk assessments, we strive to minimize these risks in every way. KVTL's work is based on a human rights approach, with a particular focus on respecting and promoting the rights of people with disabilities, including children with disabilities. KVTL aims to act in an ethically sustainable and transparent manner and is committed to valuing childhood and children as individuals, as well as promoting solidarity, humanity, and equality.

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

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

KVTL 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. KVTL 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, KVTL'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 behaviour of adults towards children, as well as on interactions between children. It has been developed in accordance with the principle and obligation of prioritizing the best interests of the child. KVTL aims to ensure that both children and adults can participate in KVTL's activities and events safely and with confidence.

2. Principles of Action

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

- ✓ One of the purposes of KVTL's activities is to promote rights of children with disabilities, with a special focus on children with intellectual disabilities. All activities and events respect children's rights and aim to create the fullest possible conditions for their realization.
- ✓ Every child is treated with respect, regardless of their disability, physical or mental health, gender, nationality or ethnic origin, religious or political beliefs, age, 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 behaviour towards children is strictly prohibited.
- ✓ KVTL recognizes every child's right to protection from all forms of physical and mental violence, harm and abuse, neglect, indifference, mistreatment, exploitation, or sexual abuse, paying due attention to particular vulnerability of children with disabilities. KVTL strives to actively promote this right within society as well.
- ✓ Children, including children with disabilities such as intellectual disabilities, are not a homogeneous group but individuals. KVTL aims to take into account the diversity of all children and the effects of different life situations and environments on their circumstances.
- ✓ KVTL trains its staff and volunteers working with children to recognize signs of child abuse or inappropriate treatment and to report any suspicious observations immediately to the relevant authorities.
- ✓ KVTL systematically checks the criminal background of volunteers working with minors.
- ✓ KVTL has ethical guidelines and principles for digital environments that promote respectful, responsible, and safe online behaviour. These guidelines ensure that children are not exposed to content or behaviour that is inappropriate for them.
- ✓ In its activities, KVTL aims to raise children's and young people's awareness, and in particular awareness of children and young people with disabilities, of their rights. The content for children is designed to be accessible and presented in a way that is appropriate for their age and developmental stage.

- ✓ The collection and use of children's data within KVTL 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.
- ✓ KVTL's advocacy activities are based on appropriate and impartial knowledge regarding children's well-being, with a particular focus on children with disabilities and their families, including their siblings, and its operations are conducted in an ethically sustainable manner.
- ✓ KVTL recognizes all children as active agents. KVTL listens to children and young people, taking into consideration communication support needs that children with disabilities may have, and takes their views into account in its work. KVTL develops opportunities for children with disabilities to influence, plan, participate in activities, and be involved in decision-making regarding their own lives and environment.
- ✓ KVTL encourages children to express their opinions and respects their perspectives.
- ✓ KVTL emphasizes the right of children to participate in ways that align with their abilities and resources and the importance of providing them with the support they may need for their participation.
- ✓ KVTL considers it important that children are spoken to and communicated with in a way they can understand. Information about participation and their health/condition is also provided in a manner that is accessible to them.
- ✓ Everyone working with children at KVTL's events or activities must accept and adhere to KVTL's Code of Conduct.
- ✓ KVTL regularly monitors and supervises its activities, including the adherence to the Code of Conduct.

3. Guidelines to Create a Safer Space

KVTL follows the principles of creating a safer space for its activities. A safe space is an inclusive place intended to provide attendees and participants, both adults and children, with a sense of physical and mental safety. This is achieved by calling for everyone to adhere to the principles of a safe space and addressing violations of these principles. Interaction flows best in a safe space and atmosphere.

- I RESPECT.
 - I remember that each of us is different and we are all equal.
 - I ensure that everyone can participate in the discussion without being rejected for their opinions.
 - I strive to recognize my own power in relation to others.
 - I do not belittle another's experience.
- I AM OPEN.
 - I meet new people without prejudice. Each of us has some preconceptions, and I strive to be aware of them.
 - I do not assume. Each of us has the right to define ourselves. For example, sexual orientation, gender, intellectual disability, or health condition is not visible externally.
 - I remember that each of us has different abilities and skills.
- I DISCUSS CONSTRUCTIVELY AND CLEARLY.
 - I participate in discussions.

- I take responsibility for the smooth flow of discussions.
- I pay attention to my choice of words. I use respectful language.
- I use language that is as easy to understand as possible.
- I listen without interrupting and verify what I have heard if necessary.
- I strive to understand what the other person is saying. If I don't understand, I ask clarifying questions.
- I APOLOGIZE.
 - I apologize if I have intentionally or unintentionally offended others.
- I INTERVENE.
 - If I observe harassment or other inappropriate behavior, I intervene.
 - I address difficult issues respectfully.
- I SUPPORT JOY AT WORK.
 - I encourage, praise, support, and bring joy.

4. *Sustainable Development*

KVTL adheres to good and responsible governance practices and promotes well-being in communities, including work communities. KVTL uses resources wisely and considers environmental impact and the need to mitigate climate change in its decisions. KVTL promotes sustainable development by building participation, inclusion and trust in society and communities and advocating for rights of people, including children, with disabilities and their families and loved ones.

KVTL provides diverse opportunities for children, young people and adults with disabilities to participate and promote issues important to them. KVTL's activities, including the premises that are used for them, are accessible to all with a low threshold for participation.

Supporting parents and parenthood is important while promoting the well-being of children and young people with disabilities, such as intellectual disabilities. KVTL's diverse activities strengthen family support and help prevent the accumulation of everyday challenges.

Responsibility and Monitoring

KVTL has a strategic plan for the 2021–2026 period. KVTL's strategy defines the measures needed to address the challenges of an ever-changing operational environment. The strategy, including the Child Protection Policy, is re-evaluated regularly by the board of KVTL.

KVTL monitors the implementation of its Child Protection Policy and Code of Conduct. Monitoring includes offering participants in KVTL's activities and events the opportunity to provide 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 KVTL's operations, guidelines, and event organization.

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