

Victim Support Guidance

**Guideline and recommendations
for interprofessional cooperation
in victim support**

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1. Introduction

The guidelines presented below have been developed as part of an international, EU-funded project called PROMISE Elpis. The focus of this project was on sexualized violence committed in connection with online technology.

These guidelines are intended to serve as an instrument for providing clear directives, action steps and recommendations for interprofessional cooperation in victim support.

In particular, the aim is to standardize processes and thus enable more efficient and effective cooperation between the Barnahus (which includes all institutions that work according to the Barnahus concept, e.g. Childhood-Haus, child advocacy centers, etc., hereinafter referred to simply as “Barnahus”) and regional victim support counseling centers. This is to better mesh victim care / victim support at the regional level. These guidelines are intended to make a valuable contribution to the harmonization of work processes in victim support.

In our opinion, counseling for sexualized violence committed in connection with online technology (online violence against children / cyberviolence) is subject to special dynamics. Attention must be paid to special challenges in the interests of the victims.

The “National Center for Missing and Exploited Children” (abbr.: NCMEC) is a private non-profit corporation in the USA whose mission is to find missing children, reduce child sexual exploitation and prevent child victimization. According to American legislation, US internet providers are obligated to forward to NCMEC any content with relevance to sexual criminal law that has become known on their platforms in the USA. NCMEC then informs the relevant law enforcement authorities around the world.

The following points should be considered when counseling victims of online violence against children / cyberviolence:

- 1) In these cases, the time of disclosure is often not chosen independently by the victim, but by others. This is in part due to the obligation to report images of abuse, which applies in the USA and has international consequences.
- 2) The confrontation of the victim with the crime and the disclosure of information on the crime (e.g. to a law enforcement agency) is also often not self-determined with the victim having no or only slight control in most cases.

3) The support and counseling of the injured person and their relatives requires a small-step and sensitive approach due to the above-mentioned specifics of information transfer and confrontation. It takes time for the victims to realize the events surrounding the crime. Due to the externally determined, inevitable confrontation with the events, it therefore requires situation-adapted counseling and future planning.

4) In the lives of today's "digital natives", sexual violence does not only occur in the analog or digital world, but rather in a mixed analog-digital world. Combining this analog and digital reality is often particularly difficult for those who have not grown up with the digital world. This can be a challenge for professionals, both technically and socially, as it becomes more difficult to understand the complex interactions and to respond appropriately.

2. Background and objectives

The following recommendations are based on the results of a Germany-wide survey, initiated and coordinated by us, which was carried out between June 2023 and March 2024 among the volunteers of Weisser Ring e.V. and the employees of individual Childhood-Haus (similar to the Barnahus institutions in Scandinavia).

Weisser Ring e.V.

Since 1976, Weisser Ring e.V. has been the only nationwide organization in Germany that actively helps victims. It is a privately financed non-profit organization. In currently 410 nationwide branch offices (as of June 2024), 3031 volunteers (as of June 2024) are committed to the goals of Weisser Ring e.V. Victims can get support from Weisser Ring e.V. in the form of immediate financial assistance or aid vouchers. The aid checks can include, for example, initial legal consultation or initial psychotraumatological consultation. Weisser Ring e.V. is also politically active in representing the interests of victims and is active in prevention work.

Childhood-Haus

A Childhood-Haus is an outpatient, central and interdisciplinary contact point where children and adolescents who are victims of neglect or physical or sexualized violence can receive comprehensive care and support. In Childhood-Haus, necessary medical, gynecological, and forensic examinations for further clarification, documentation of objective findings as well as judicially sound evidence can be coordinated on site. Depending on the individual case, socio-educational and psychological counseling is provided on site and/or case adapted and regional help is initiated. Police and court hearings can be audio-visually recorded for judicially sound documentation or directly transmitted from the Childhood-Haus to the court if needed.

Due to the considerable regional and national differences in victim support structures, a general guideline for improving interprofessional cooperation between Barnahus and regional victim support counseling centers was derived (Chapter 4). This recommendation for action can therefore serve as a template, suggestion and inspiration for all institutions involved in child support that wish to improve or intensify the cooperation in victim support. The guideline is intended

to serve as a structured means of adapting cooperation at the regional level to the prevailing requirements, structures and victim support networks in different countries. Specific and binding agreements on cooperation between Barnahus and the regional victim support centers are to be drawn up. This will improve the prevailing structures in victim support, strengthen interprofessional cooperation and build up existing networks in the interests of victims.

The procedural steps and findings from the model project on cooperation between the Childhood-Haus and Weisser Ring e.V. are included in the recommendations for developing guidelines for Barnahus and regional victim counseling centers.

These can therefore serve as a possible template for the development of specific guidelines and recommendations at a national or regional level, taking into account the prevailing structures and opportunities. The guideline in Chapter 6 contains our specific recommendations for improving cooperation between Childhood-Haus and Weisser Ring e.V., such as case-independent agreements in advance or preferred communication paths for networking.

In order to train future users of the guideline, we also recommend designing an online training course. As part of the EU project PROMISE Elpis, an online training course was developed, offered, and evaluated specifically for the cooperation between Childhood-Haus and Weisser Ring e.V. A general recommendation for the implementation of online training is listed in Chapter 7.

3. General explanation of guideline development

First of all, a coordinating lead should be identified to coordinate the guideline development and to implement the training courses on their use. This impulse can be set by Barnahus, for example.

Depending on the possibilities and available resources, a structured survey within Barnahus and the regional victim support counseling centers is helpful as an analysis of the current situation prior to the development of the guidelines. The content of the survey could be the mutual previous knowledge of the individual players, existing cooperation, the previous form of cooperation, and the identification of existing hurdles or problems in the previous cooperation. This could be done in the form of an online questionnaire, for example. The results of such a survey could influence the individual development of a guideline for interprofessional cooperation and could assist to identify important interfaces. The following are specific examples from the analysis of the current situation as part of the model project Childhood-Haus and Weisser Ring e.V.

Exemplary excerpts of the questions for the Childhood-Haus:

- Have you already made families, adolescent, or children aware of the help provided by Weisser Ring e.V. as part of your work in the Childhood-Haus?
- Do you know how many Weisser Ring e.V. branch offices are responsible for the service area of your Childhood-Haus?
- For what purpose have you previously consulted the Weisser Ring e.V.? (Multiple answers possible.)
- Are there any problems/challenges in relation with Weisser Ring e.V. at your location, and if so, what are they?

Exemplary excerpts of the questions for Weisser Ring e.V.:

- Do you know in the service area of which Childhood-Haus your branch office is located?
- Have you already made people aware of the help offered by Childhood-Haus as part of your voluntary work for Weisser Ring e.V.?

- What were the reasons for the Childhood-Haus to contact you thus far?
- Are there any problems/challenges in cooperation with Childhood-Haus at your location, and if so, what are they?

The results of the survey can be taken into account the development of the guidelines. The recommendations in this publication can be made on this basis. They serve as a possible template for a binding guideline and contain what we consider to be the most important agreements between cooperating organizations in victim support. If possible, the developed guideline should include binding regulations on interprofessional cooperation explained in the following chapter and be coordinated with the respective cooperation partners.

4. Instructions to develop guidelines for Barnahus and regional victim counseling centers

The findings presented below stem from the analysis of the current situation, which was carried out in 2023/2024 at the Childhood-Haus and Weisser Ring e.V. On this basis, it is possible to create an individual guideline step by step.

Contact design

Objective: Promote effective and continuous communication between Barnahus and regional victim support centers to optimize the exchange of information and resources and to improve case-related support for affected persons.

Procedure: Establishment of a structured, case-independent contact between the Barnahus counseling specialists and the regional victim support counseling centers.

Implementation:

- Binding agreements for a standard mutual contact which is established by the employees of Barnahus as part of the opening of a new Barnahus
- All employees should be informed about the respective organizational structure of the cooperation partner. Organizational charts can be provided for this purpose
- It is important that all employees know the service hours of the cooperation partners and of the responsible employees
- Suitable timeslots for joint consultation of the employees of the cooperating institutions should be determined in order to improve cooperation

Information material

Objective: Obtaining knowledge and information material on the respective cooperation partner in order to improve the quality of the own victim counseling.

Procedure: All cooperation partners should familiarize themselves with the content of the available information material of the cooperation partner. Therefore, the content of the cooperation partner's services can be discussed and important information like access routes for victims to cooperation partners can be incorporated into the counseling of victims.

Implementation:

- Active exploration of the services offered by the respective institution (e.g. online)
- Mutual exchange of information material: flyers, weblink, business cards. If available, also in child-/adolescent-friendly language
- Knowledge of the regional availability of the cooperation partner's offering (service areas)
- Mutual exchange of information on the respective online presence for the paperless forwarding of information to victims and quick access to the respective contact details. This enables quick and easy clarification, e.g. of case-related queries.

Joint consultations

Objective: The joint consultations should take place according to the Barnahus standard in child-friendly premises and in a supportive environment.

Procedure: Review of existing space resources in the local Barnahus. If they are already involved in the care of the affected children/adolescents, we recommend a consultation in their child-friendly premises, which the child is already familiar with in the best case. In accordance with the Barnahus standards (see Barnahus quality standards 2017), we recommend a child-centered approach in which the various actors involved in victim support visit the child at a predetermined, child-friendly location, thus sparing the child numerous trips to different institutions and constantly changing premises and contact persons.

Implementation:

- Taking into account the Barnahus concept, preferred planning of victim support counseling at the child-friendly Barnahus premises which are familiar to the child

Contact and feedback

Objective: Creation of a clear and transparent communication process between the cooperation partners that enables both sides to establish effective and comprehensible contact and defines binding time windows in which to expect case-related feedback from the cooperation partner.

Procedure: All relevant information should be recorded in writing for both sides in order to ensure transparency and traceability based on the country-specific data protection directives.

Implementation:

- Possible communication paths can be: via telephone, e-mail or online portals (if available)
- The preferred communication path for case work should be set out in the guideline and used in a binding manner
- Suitable timeslots for joint consultations should be recorded in writing
- Definition of a binding response time of the requested institution can be expected

Regular exchange

Objective: Regular exchange between the cooperation partners with the aim of adapting the processes to current circumstances and continuously integrating the assistance in the best possible way.

Procedure: Repeat joint meetings at defined intervals to enable this knowledge to be maintained even with changing employees.

Implementation:

Regular appointments are made to coordinate suitable timeslots for case-dependent contact, joint consultations, and to establish communication paths

Online training

Objective: Dissemination and training of the guideline content. Refreshing already known contents, evaluation of the application if necessary.

Procedure: A training course should be offered for the employees of both cooperation partners who work in an advisory capacity. This course should explain the content and application of the specifically adapted guideline.

Implementation:

- Implementation of an online training course by the coordinating and leading institution (e.g. Barnahus)
- Employees of both institutions involved in counseling victims should participate in the online training, e.g. once a year, for the practical implementation of the guideline content
- As part of the online training, existing obstacles in cooperation should be repeatedly identified and dealt with in order to be able to remove them in a targeted manner
- Online training could also include a brief evaluation of previous experience with the application and implementation of the guideline content

5. Model project Childhood-Haus and Weisser Ring e.V.

The present study is based on an examination of the German landscape of cooperation between victim support organizations. In particular, Childhood-Haus and Weisser Ring e.V. were chosen as a model project.

The care landscape for victim support in Germany is heterogeneous and the range of counseling centers and offers for victims of sexualized violence varies greatly from region to region. Weisser Ring e.V. deserves special mention as a counseling center for victims of sexual violence. It works throughout Germany and has numerous regional offices, branch offices and volunteers. Therefore, and for its central organizational structure, Weisser Ring e.V. was identified as a suitable cooperation partner for the development of the guideline presented here. The integration of the victim counseling and victim support services of Weisser Ring e.V. into the Childhood-Haus concept considerably strengthens victim support and victim support. Weisser Ring e.V. has extensive experience in providing legal advice, support during court proceedings and assistance with victim compensation. The provision of this specialized help within the Childhood-Haus ensures that the affected children and adolescents receive comprehensive support.

The aim was to develop a guideline for all advisors that would facilitate and standardize case-related cooperation and create binding structures. The following guidelines were distributed via Weisser Ring e.V. office to all Weisser Ring e.V. regional offices and via the Childhood-Haus mailing list to the coordinating specialists of the Childhood-Haus as well as to the World Childhood Foundation Germany.

6. Guidelines for interprofessional cooperation of Weisser Ring e.V. and Childhood-Haus in victim support

Case-independent contact

Objective: The aim is to promote effective and continuous communication between the volunteer counselors of Weisser Ring e.V. and the coordinating specialists at the Childhood-Haus locations. This is intended to improve the exchange of information and cooperation and to optimize support for affected persons.

Procedure: The aim is to establish structured, case-independent contact between the counselors at the local Weisser Ring e.V. branch offices and the coordinating specialists at the individual Childhood-Haus locations.

- When a Childhood-Haus is opened, the employees of the Childhood-Haus make contact with the responsible Weisser Ring e.V. branch office and with the local branch managers as standard.
- All employees should be informed on the respective organizational structure of childhood homes and Weisser Ring e.V. Organizational charts can be provided for this purpose.
- It is important that all employees know the opening hours of the nearest Childhood-Haus as well as the availability of the responsible Weisser Ring e.V. volunteers.
- Joint counseling times between the volunteers of Weisser Ring e.V. and the Childhood-Haus should be determined to enable better cooperation.

Information material

Objective: The aim is to acquire the necessary knowledge and resources to improve the quality of one's own advice.

Procedure: Employees of both organizations should actively familiarize themselves with the available information material and the organizational structures.

- We recommend getting familiar with the services offered by the respective institution, e.g. by visiting the following homepages:
- Weisser Ring e.V.: www.weisser-ring.de/hilfe-fuer-opfer/hilfe-vor-ort
- Childhood-Haus: www.childhood-de.org/childhood-haus/haeuser/
- There should be a mutual exchange of information on the respective online presences in order to enable paperless information transfer. This makes it easier for affected persons to quickly find the right contact details and promotes rapid clarification of case-related queries.
- Childhood-Haus should receive the following information material from Weisser Ring e.V.: flyers, information folder, homepage links, reference to the e-mail portal for data protection-safe e-mail communication, business cards and magazines. If available, material should also be provided in a language suitable for children and adolescents.
- Weisser Ring e.V. volunteers should receive the following information material about Childhood-Haus in their catchment area: flyers and, in future, additional material if available. Here too, child-friendly material should be used if available.

Counseling by Weisser Ring e.V. volunteers at Childhood-Haus

Objective: The aim is to make optimum use of the Childhood-Haus concept for the benefit of children and adolescents. At the same time, the spatial resources of the houses are to be used effectively for the services offered by Weisser Ring e.V. in order to create a supportive and protected environment for the target groups.

Procedure: The available resources in terms of space are reviewed and the different organizational structures of the two institutions are taken into account.

- Counseling for children and adolescents and their caregivers should preferably take place at the Childhood-Haus premises in order to take advantage of the confidential and child-friendly atmosphere of the house.
- The Childhood-Haus concept should be considered in the interests of the persons concerned and their relatives. The specialists are asked to come to the Childhood-Haus in order to bundle all offers of help centrally in one place.
- The six-eyes principle of Weisser Ring e.V., which is the objective for certain victim cases, can be implemented more easily through cooperation with the Childhood-Haus employees.

Procedure for establishing mutual contact

Objective: The aim is to create a clear and transparent communication process that enables effective and comprehensible contact for both sides.

Procedure: All relevant information for both sides is recorded in writing to ensure transparency and traceability.

- Contact can be made via telephone, e-mail or after registration via the Weisser Ring e.V. e-mail portal for data protection-secure e-mail communication.
- The preferred method of communication for casework should be determined in a joint meeting and documented in writing.
- Joint consultation times should be recorded in writing to enable clear agreements.

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- A response to contact requests should be provided within three working days at most.
- It is recommended that the employees of the respective Childhood-Haus register with the Weisser Ring e.V. e-mail portal for data protection-secure e-mail communication if this is desired as the preferred contact channel.

Regular exchange and online training

Objective: Processes are to be adapted to current circumstances and support services are to be continuously and optimally integrated with one another.

Procedure: Regular meetings are held at fixed intervals to ensure that new employees also get information on the processes.

- Regular appointments are made to coordinate the time overlaps between the Childhood-Haus opening hours and the activities of the volunteers.
- Annual participation in an online training course on the application and the contents of these guidelines is planned. Existing obstacles to joint consultation are to be identified and specifically addressed as part of the online training.

7. General recommendations for the implementation of online training

Online training should be offered regularly – ideally once a year – to allow for the introductory training of new employees and structural changes. The aim of the training course is to provide all participants with a structured basis of information about possible cooperation partners, their organizational structures and the possibilities of mutually coordinated cooperation in victim support. The online training format has many advantages. It is flexible in terms of time (flexibility) and does not require travel, which in turn is cost-neutral (cost savings). It is location-independent and barrier-free (access to further training).

7.1 Training course structure

When designing an effective online training course, a clear structure and user-friendliness should be of central importance in order to maximize the learning success of participants. It should also include room for questions and suggestions from the participants. A potential structure is outlined below:

- Access link

An access link should be provided to all participants before the start of the training.

- Technical requirements and support

It would be important to clearly communicate in advance the obligatory technical requirements for participating in the training (e.g. stable Internet connection, compatible browsers, or programs).

- Introduction and objectives

At the beginning of the training it would be useful to give a short introduction explaining the objectives of the training and the benefits for participants. This could help to clarify expectations and prepare participants for the training content. It could also be useful to provide technical information on how to use the platform or interact with it.

- Content structure

Theoretical input: Content of the guideline and specific implementation

Practical examples

- Summary and conclusion**- Evaluation and feedback**

It could be helpful to provide a short feedback questionnaire after the training, e.g. via QR code. This could be completed by the participants during the training course. The results of this feedback form would then be used to continuously improve the training by taking the participants' feedback into account.

7.2 Implementation with time frame

The training should be offered annually in order to regularly refresh the participants' knowledge. In our experience, 60 to 90 minutes is a suitable length for the training course as this is an appropriate duration for conveying relevant content.

To enable broad participation, it would be advisable to offer training at different times. This would give participants more flexibility, making it easier for them to integrate the training into their personal and professional schedules.

We also recommend announcing the training course well in advance so that participants have sufficient time to register. After registration, they could be provided with an access link that ensures easy access to the training.

Internet source

Barnahus quality standards (2017): Barnahus (online) https://www.barnahus.eu/en/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/DE-StandardsSummary_FINAL.pdf, accessed on 25/11/2025.

Disclaimer

Promise Elpis is committed to upholding the highest standards in child protection and ethical communication. The [Luxembourg Guidelines \(2016\)](#) promote the use of consistent, accurate, and sensitive language – particularly in the context of child protection – that avoids confusion, stigma and harm, and avoids contributing to further victimization or misunderstanding. The guidelines are intended to be applied broadly within the field, including the creation of policies, legal documents, reports, and public communication.

To best achieve these aims, our work follows the Luxembourg Guidelines and any updates to it. Further, we adapt as terminology evolves by developing internal guidance that aligns with these principles. When citing external sources, we retain the original language to preserve the intended meaning and context, ensuring the accuracy and authenticity of the cited content.

Implementing the Barnahus Quality Standards throughout Europe

PROMISE is supporting Europe to adopt the Barnahus model as a standard practice for providing child victims and witnesses of violence rapid access to justice and care. We undertake this work to fulfil the PROMISE vision: a Europe where all children enjoy their right to be protected from violence.

Barnahus provides multi-disciplinary and interagency collaboration to ensure that child victims and witnesses of violence benefit from a child-friendly, professional and effective response in a safe environment which prevents (re)traumatization. With the formal support from national authorities, PROMISE provides opportunities to translate national commitment into action and engage internationally in the process. In addition, regular networking and strategic communications continually activate our growing network of professionals and stakeholders who are committed to introducing and expanding Barnahus services nationally.

The first PROMISE project (2015-2017) set European standards and engaged a broad network of professionals. The second PROMISE project (2017-2019) promoted national level progress towards meeting the standards and formalized the PROMISE Barnahus Network. The third project (2020-2022) expanded these activities to include University training, case management tools, with a view to establishing a European Competence Centre for Barnahus and laying the groundwork for an accreditation system for Barnahus. The current project: PROMISE ELPIS (2023-2025) is managed by Charité-University Medicine, Berlin, and promotes multidisciplinary and interagency models for child victims and witnesses of sexual violence, with a specific focus on specialised interventions and excellence in practice in cases where there is a presumed online element of the sexual violence.

Access the PROMISE tools and learn more at www.barnahus.eu



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