

# CHILD PROTECTION AT AISCT



# AISCT

AMERICAN INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL OF CAPE TOWN



Updated February 2021



Dear AISCT Community Members,

AISCT has adopted a child protection policy to guide our staff and families in matters related to the health, safety, and care of children in attendance at our school.

The AISCT child protection policy is based on international law and on the **United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child** of which South Africa is a signatory. This key article from the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is important, and we wish to draw your attention to it:

**ARTICLE 19 - PROTECTION FROM ABUSE AND NEGLECT**

**The State shall protect the child from all forms of maltreatment by parents or others responsible for the care of the child and establish appropriate social programs for the prevention of abuse and the treatment of victims.**

By being a member of our AISCT community, you agree to work in partnership with the school and abide by the child protection protocols in place. All of us at AISCT genuinely value our community partnership in providing for the safety and care of our students. It is for this reason that AISCT has endorsed a child protection policy that defines the standards by which all AISCT students should be treated. As part of our overall educational programs and specific to our shared responsibility to educate children and to ensure a safe environment in which all children can learn and grow, AISCT will:

1. Provide age-appropriate lessons for all grade levels to help students understand personal safety, needs, and rights.
2. Provide parent materials and information sessions to help you better understand our programs and policy.
3. Bi-annually review the child protection policy with faculty and staff to recognize and be able to report issues of abuse and neglect.

We hope to work together at home and at school to ensure our children are safe and are knowledgeable about their rights and responsibilities to themselves and to each other. Thank you for your support of our efforts. Please contact your child's school counselor or principal regarding any specific questions you may have in this regard.

Sincerely,



Dr. Daniel Jubert

**Head of School**



## **CONTENTS**

AISCT CHILD PROTECTION POLICY	4
RECOGNIZING CHILD ABUSE	5
DISCLOSURE OF ABUSE	9
PROCEDURES FOR REPORTING ABUSE	9
BEHAVIOR GUIDELINES FOR SCHOOL STAFF	11
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS	12
RESOURCES AND LINKS	15

## AISCT CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

Child abuse and neglect are concerns throughout the world. They are violations of a child's human rights and obstacles to the child's education as well as to their physical, emotional, and spiritual development. The American International School of Cape Town endorses the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, of which our host country, South Africa, is a signatory. Schools fill a special institutional role in society as protectors of children. Schools need to ensure that all children in their care are afforded a safe and secure environment in which to grow and develop, both at school and away. Educators, having the opportunity to observe and interact with children every day and over time, are in a unique position to identify children who are in need of help and protection. As such, educators have a professional and ethical obligation to ensure the safety of the child and to take steps to ensure that the child and family are aware of the available services needed to remedy any situation that constitutes child abuse or neglect.

All staff employed at AISCT are legally required, regardless of age of the child concerned, to report suspected incidents of child abuse or neglect whenever the staff member has reasonable cause to believe that a child has suffered or is at significant risk of suffering abuse or neglect. Reporting and follow up of all suspected incidents of child abuse or neglect will proceed in accordance with administrative regulations respective to this policy, which is based on the Western Cape Education Department's Abuse No More Protocol. AISCT seeks to be a safe haven for students who may be experiencing abuse or neglect in any aspect of their lives. As such, AISCT will distribute our policy annually to all parents and applicants, will communicate this policy annually to students, will provide training for all staff, and will make every effort to implement hiring practices to ensure the safety of children. In the case of a staff member reported as an alleged offender, AISCT will conduct a full investigation following a carefully designed course of due process, keeping the safety of the child at the highest priority.

## RECOGNIZING CHILD ABUSE

As parents and educators, you will often be the first to notice the change in the behavior of a child. This change could be the result of child abuse, and it is vital that you recognize the signs and what constitutes child abuse.

Child abuse can be defined as **“any interaction or lack of interaction by a parent or caretaker which results in the non-accidental harm to the child’s physical and/or developmental state.”\***

The term child abuse therefore includes not only the physical non-accidental injury of children but also emotional abuse, sexual abuse, and neglect. Therefore abuse can range from habitually humiliating a child to not giving the necessary care.

Abuse and neglect fall into the following areas: physical, emotional, sexual, and neglect.

### PHYSICAL ABUSE

- Physical abuse is deliberately hurting a child. It is not accidental.
- Physical abuse/harm may also be caused when a parent/caregiver fabricates the symptoms of or deliberately induces illness in a child.
- It is important to remember that all children have accidents and that bumps and bruises do not necessarily mean that a child is being physically abused, but if the child often has injuries and there is a pattern or the explanation given does not match the injury, then we must take this further.

#### POSSIBLE INDICATORS OF PHYSICAL ABUSE

- Unexplained bruises and welts on any part of the body
- Bruises of different ages (various colors)
- Injuries reflecting shape of article used (electric cord, belt, buckle, hand)
- Injuries that regularly appear after an absence or vacation
- Unexplained burns, especially to soles, palms, back, or buttocks
- Burns with a pattern from an electric burner, iron, or cigarette
- Rope burns on arms, legs, neck, or torso
- Injuries inconsistent with information offered by the child
- Immersion burns with a distinct boundary line
- Unexplained laceration, abrasions, or fractures

## EMOTIONAL ABUSE

- Emotional abuse is the ongoing maltreatment or emotional neglect of a child, such as to cause severe and persistent adverse effects of the child's emotional development. It may convey to a child that he is worthless/unloved/inadequate. It can also involve deliberately trying to scare/humiliate the child or isolating him and ignoring him. They may not have the opportunity to express their views and could involve making fun of what he says or how he says it.
- It could also feature age or developmentally inappropriate expectations being imposed on the child. These could include being overprotected and limiting his social interaction. Some level of emotional abuse is involved in all types of maltreatment of a child, though it could/may occur on its own.

### POSSIBLE INDICATORS OF EMOTIONAL ABUSE

- Bed wetting or bed soiling that has no medical cause
- Suffers from severe developmental gaps
- Severe symptoms of depression, anxiety, withdrawal, or aggression
- Severe symptoms of self-destructive behaviour, e.g., self-harming, suicide attempts, engaging in drug or alcohol abuse
- Frequent psychosomatic complaints, e.g., headaches, nausea, abdominal pains

## SEXUAL ABUSE

- Sexual abuse involves forcing or enticing a child/young person to take part in sexual activities. This includes prostitution, whether or not the child is aware of what is happening.
- The activities may involve physical contact, including penetrative rape, oral sex, or non-physical contact. They may include non-contact activities such as looking at sexual images, watching sexual activities, encouraging children to behave in a sexual way, or grooming a child via the internet.
- Grooming is when someone builds an emotional connection with a child/young person to gain his trust for the purposes of sexual abuse or participation.
- They tend to be groomed online by a stranger or even someone they know of any age or gender.

### POSSIBLE INDICATORS OF SEXUAL ABUSE

- Sexual knowledge, behavior or use of language not appropriate to age level
- Unusual interpersonal relationship patterns
- Venereal disease in a child of any age
- Evidence of physical trauma or bleeding to the oral, genital, or anus areas
- Difficulty in walking or sitting
- Refusing to change into physical education (PE) clothes, fear of bathrooms
- Child running away from home and not giving any specific complaint
- Not wanting to be alone with an individual

## NEGLECT

Neglect is failure to provide for a child's basic needs within his own environment. There are 7 definitions of defying a child's needs:

- Basic care
  - Affection
  - Security
  - Stimulation and innate potential
  - Guidance and control
  - Responsibility
  - Independence
- Neglect is the ongoing failure to meet the child's needs, both basic physical, and/or psychological needs which are likely to result in the serious impairment of the child's health or development.
  - Neglect may occur during pregnancy as a result of maternal substance abuse. Once a child is born, the parent/caregiver fails to provide food, shelter or clothing. They fail to protect the child from physical, emotional danger/harm. They could miss hospital appointments and fail to give the appropriate medicine or treatment. They do not provide adequate supervision when they are not around.

## TYPES OF NEGLECT

**Physical:** failure to ensure the child's basic needs and safety

**Educational:** failure to ensure the child receives an education

**Emotional:** failure to meet the child's needs for nurturing and stimulation

**Medical:** failure to provide health care, including dental care

### POSSIBLE INDICATORS OF NEGLECT

- Child is unwashed or hungry
- Parents are uninterested in child's academic performance
- Parents do not respond to repeated communications from the school
- Child does not want to go home
- Parents cannot be reached in case of an emergency

## DISCLOSURE OF ABUSE

At the time of disclosure, whether it is accidental or purposeful by the child, it is important to react carefully and to show as much empathy as possible. Try not to react with anger about the incident and put your feelings aside until the child has been assisted.

The role of the educator and/or parent is one of reporting the abuse and supporting the child, not investigating the case. For example, it is not the educator's role or responsibility to insist on seeing physical evidence of abuse or to question the child about the abuse.

Once a disclosure has been made, it should be directly reported to the school's Child Protection Leads, and the reporting process will follow.

Source: [Adapted from Childline SA](#)

## PROCEDURES FOR REPORTING ABUSE

Educators and parents are in contact with children on a daily basis. As such, they are bound to be confronted with a child abuse case at some point. Dealing with this abuse in the correct manner could make the difference between the perpetrator being convicted or acquitted. In addition, a child who has just disclosed information is vulnerable and requires special care.

Sometimes children make disclosures of abuse to educators. Sometimes educators observe the behavior and well-being of children and may suspect that the child is being abused.

However, it is important to remember that no matter what the policy of the school or what another educator may tell you, educators have a statutory responsibility to report child abuse, and failure to do so is a crime. As a school, we are obligated to report abuse or suspicions of abuse to the relevant Child Protection associations.

Generally, an educator or member of the school community would notify the Child Protection Leads of their concerns. Once the report is made, to respect the confidentiality of the process, the reporting person has fulfilled his/her obligation and will not receive further updates or information, unless required by law. The Child Protection Leads will then follow the necessary reporting steps:

### STEP 1

The reporting person should document the following:

- Child's name,
- Reasons for concern, any documentation of indicators, and any relevant statements made by the child.

## STEP 2

The reporting person informs the designated Child Protection Lead at the school. However, the reporting of abuse and neglect is mandated by law, and this law supersedes school policy.

No investigation should be carried out by the school personnel at this stage or any other time.

## STEP 3

The Child Protection Lead will contact a social worker from the Child Welfare Society or the Child Protection Officer of the South African Police Services. The following should be noted:

- the name of the person making contact,
- the name of the intake worker receiving the contact;
- the date and time of the report, and
- the action proposed by the external agency.

## STEP 4

The social worker and/or police will interview the child and/or family members as soon as possible.

## STEP 5

The social worker and/or the police will interview the alleged abuser.

A decision concerning the child's safety will be made by the social worker at this time.

If response from the agency is slow and particularly if the child remains at risk, the Child Protection Lead should follow up until the child is safe.

## STEP 6

At the end of the investigation, the school personnel, the family/the parents, and the social worker may meet to discuss the steps the school could take to assist the child.

## BEHAVIOUR GUIDELINES FOR SCHOOL STAFF

Below are sample behavior policies that will protect teachers from false allegations.

- Avoid situations in which you are alone with a child. This includes not transporting youngsters alone in your car.
- When it is necessary to speak privately with a child, find a space out of earshot, but within sight of others, for your conference.
- The privacy of children in situations such as toileting, showering, and changing clothes should be respected.
- When it is necessary to supervise children in these situations, at least two adults should be present and intrude only to the extent that the health and safety of the children are required.
- Adult volunteers should preserve their own privacy in these situations also.
- Avoid touching areas that are normally covered by swimming suits, e.g., breasts, buttocks, and groin.
- When hugging is appropriate, hug from the side over the shoulders, not from the front.
- Sexual jokes, comments of a sexual nature, kissing, sensual massages, or sexual gestures are not appropriate behavior for an adult staff member or volunteer.
- When volunteering to supervise overnight activities, adults should not share sleeping quarters with children other than their own.
- Revealing personal information about one's sex life by an adult volunteer or staff member is never appropriate.
- Do not use corporal punishment in any form.
- It is the adult's responsibility to set and respect boundaries.
- When a child attempts to involve an adult in inappropriate behavior, the adult must reject the overture.
- Do not engage in any personal social media connections with students, i.e. Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat, WhatsApp, etc.
- If social media is to be used for school purposes (i.e. WhatsApp group), ensure that two adults are part of any conversations with students.

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### **Why should I report?**

The primary intent of reporting is to identify suspected abused and neglected children as soon as possible, so they can be protected from further harm. Reporting should be regarded as a request for an investigation into a suspected incident of abuse or neglect. A report does not necessarily constitute a proven fact; it is the raising of a question about the condition or state of a child. Without detection, reporting, and intervention, a child may suffer irreparable emotional and physical harm or remain a victim for the rest of his life. Furthermore, it is correspondingly important to provide help for the suspected abuser.

### **Who must report?**

Anyone who works for or volunteers at the American International School of Cape Town and has reasonable cause to believe that a child has suffered abuse or neglect must, in good faith, report suspected abuse or neglect. The staff of the school includes all personnel (paid and voluntary) working within the school environment, e.g., teachers, special needs assistants, visiting speakers, teachers, bus escorts, drivers, ancillary staff, parents helping out, etc.

### **What if I am not sure I should make a report?**

You do not need concrete proof. You should discuss the situation with the Child Protection Leads or principal. If you are in doubt about what should be reported, it is better to make your concerns known than to remain silent and possibly allow a child to remain unprotected.

### **When should I report?**

If there is reasonable cause to believe that a child has suffered abuse or neglect, the report must be made at the first opportunity but no longer than 48 hours. The report must include the identity of the accused if known.

### **What if the abuse occurred in the past?**

The reporting requirement does not apply to abuse or neglect that occurred during childhood if it is discovered after the child has become an adult. However, if there is reason to believe other children are or may be at risk of abuse and neglect by the accused, the reporting requirement does apply.

### **How do I make a report and to whom do I report it?**

The Child Protection Leads at the school should receive your report. They can receive reports either by phone, verbally, in person, or on a written form and will assess the report to determine if it meets the required definition of abuse and neglect.

## **What information will I be asked to provide?**

You will be asked to submit the following information:

- Your name and the name of the child
- The nature and extent of the child abuse or neglect
- Any information about previous incidents of abuse or neglect to your knowledge
- If known, the nationality of the mother or father

## **Can I get in trouble or sued for making a report?**

Any person who in good faith makes a report or gives testimony in regard to possible child abuse or neglect will not get into any trouble, will not be sued, nor have repercussions. Child Protection Leads, who are authorized to receive child abuse and neglect reports, fall under the same protection.

## **Should I tell the parents I made the report?**

Policy does NOT require you to inform the parents or guardian about the suspected abuse or neglect report. This is the decision of the Head of School and/or Child Protection Lead. Furthermore, there may be instances in which informing parents of your report could be detrimental to the child or make matters worse.

These instances may include:

- A situation when the child's safety would be jeopardized
- When a child is in imminent danger and the parent might take the student out of school
- The child's situation becomes even more precarious after the investigation is finished
- The parent is able to hide or cover up pertinent information prior to the investigation
- A child easily coached into what to say or not to say because abused children are often protective of their parents and guardians

## **What is my responsibility after reporting child abuse or neglect?**

Most often the Child Protection Lead will investigate the report independently and may not require any further assistance from you. Occasionally, and in some instances, you may be asked to provide further information or clarification regarding any pertinent and personal knowledge of the case.

## **Will I receive feedback from the Child Protection Lead?**

As the person who made the report, you may request information about the findings or decision to investigate and receive a brief confidential summary of the status of the case. However, the Child Protection Lead may not divulge further information about the child or family unless there is a continuing plan and your help is requested. It is important that all parties maintain strict confidentiality in all parts of the reported abuse or neglect.

### **What happens if I suspect other children abusing children?**

Children who may have been abused may abuse other children. While children can be children in their play, if you suspect other than normal interaction, you should report it to the Child Protection Lead.

### **Will my report be confidential?**

Reporters are required to give their name when they make a report; however, reporters may request anonymity to protect their privacy. Unless a reporter gives written consent, his/her name will not be disclosed except to a legal representative such as a lawyer, embassy personnel, and the like.

### **Is parental consent required to take photographs of suspicious injuries?**

No. The school nurse may take photographs, usually, without consent from parents or caregivers. However, any other use of these photographs is prohibited and strictly confidential.

### **How can I tell if a child is not telling the truth?**

This is difficult to tell and only well trained professionals should make the effort to determine whether a child is lying or not. Keep in mind that there is purpose in what children say and do, especially young children. Children typically lie for two reasons. The first is to get out of trouble they believe they are in. The second motive is to prevent trouble in their eyes; if they believe they are in trouble, they may not want the information going back to their parents, which may be a negative experience for them. In addition, children may want to protect those closest to them and often feel they will cause trouble by telling the truth. A good concept to keep in mind is that children are pretty astute at observing behaviors but not necessarily very good at interpreting them accurately like an adult could.

### **Do I need to sign a confidentiality agreement?**

Yes. Students and their families enrolled in the school have the right to expect that all those who are employed and volunteer at AISCT will keep information about them deemed sensitive and private confidential. Confidentiality is privileged information that should be accessible only to those authorized to have access, typically identified by the Head of School. This is especially important when dealing with child abuse or neglect cases.

## RESOURCES AND LINKS

### **The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child**

[http://www.unicef.org/crc/index\\_30160.html](http://www.unicef.org/crc/index_30160.html)

### **AISA Child Protection Handbook and Resources**

<https://aisa.or.ke/Child-Protection>

### **CIS Child Protection Policy**

<https://www.cois.org/about-cis/child-protection>

### **Abuse No More Protocol of the Western Cape Education Department**

<https://www.westerncape.gov.za/text/2014/October/amended-abuse-no-more-protocol.pdf>

### **Childline South Africa**

<http://www.childlinesa.org.za/>

### **Cape Town Child Welfare**

<http://www.helpkids.org.za/>

### **National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC):**

<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/>