

INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY  
— SCHOOL OF ABIDJAN —

# Child Protection at ICOSA

## 2022 - 23

## An important note for parents

Dear Parents,

Child protection is extremely important and we are committed to ensuring the protection of all of our students. In August 2017, the school adopted a Child Protection Policy which sets definitions for child abuse as well as outlines preventative measures and guidelines for the school's response in case of suspected abuse.

By enrolling your child at ICSA, you agree to work in partnership with the school and abide by our policies. All of us at ICSA want you to know that we genuinely value our partnership with you in providing for the safety and care of your children.

Following this policy, ICSA is committed to setting up procedures to verify the previous employment for any new job applicants as well as to ensure all members of the ICSA community are informed and educated regarding symptoms of child abuse.

We hope you share our commitment and will work with us to ensure our children are safe as well as knowledgeable about their rights and responsibilities. Your support of our efforts is important. If you have any specific questions, please contact the Designated Safeguarding Lead, school Counselors or Principals. Thank you in advance for working with us on this important initiative.

Séamus Hennessy  
ICSA Director

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The ICSA Child Protection Committee publishes *Child Protection at ICSA*, an official ICSA publication, with support from administrators, counselors, and teachers. This publication is adapted from *Child Protection at IST*, a publication of the International School of Tanganyika (Tanzania) and The American International School of Muscat (TAISM).

## Child Protection Policy at ICSA

The International Community School of Abidjan endorses the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, of which our host country, Côte d'Ivoire, is a signatory. The two key articles we wish to draw your attention to are:

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.

Article 34 - Sexual exploitation - The State shall protect children from sexual exploitation and abuse, including prostitution and involvement in pornography.

We believe that every child has the right to be protected from harm and all forms of abuse.

### **Child Protection Policy (from the Parent-Student Handbook)**

The School believes that every child has the right to be protected from harm and all forms of abuse, including physical, sexual and emotional abuse as well as domestic violence and neglect. The School also believes that no child bears the responsibility for the abuse perpetrated on him or her by another. If a child is harmed, he or she has the right to treatment and support.

### **Definitions**

According to the World Health Organization, "Child maltreatment, sometimes referred to as child abuse and neglect, includes all forms of physical and emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect, and exploitation that results in actual or potential harm to the child's health, development or dignity. Within this broad definition, five subtypes can be distinguished: physical abuse; sexual abuse; neglect and negligent treatment; emotional abuse; and exploitation."

The School sets out below common definitions of abusive behavior as specified under the laws of Cote d'Ivoire.

- Physical Abuse: Non accidental physical injury including but not limited to female genital mutilation (FGM), burns, human bites, bruises, lacerations, bone fractures, missing teeth and any internal or head injuries, any of which have been intentionally inflicted.
- Sexual Abuse: Exploitation of a child by an adult or a child for sexual gratification, including but not limited to obscene conversation, exposure to pornographic material, exhibitionism, genital fondling, incest, and rape.
- Emotional Abuse: Mental anguish and/or chronic emotional pain caused by such things as rejection, isolation, severe humiliation, excessive teasing and verbal assault.
- Domestic Violence: Allowing a child to witness violence within his/her immediate environment.
- Neglect: Persistent abandonment; failure to provide adequate food, water, clothing, shelter or medical care for a child; failure to protect a child from exposure to any danger which may affect his or her health or development.

### **Cultural and religious differences**

Within the universally accepted norms of human rights framework, culture, religion or tradition can never be invoked to condone any form of violence against children.

## How are abuse and neglect defined?

Definitions of abuse are complex and based in various cultures of child-rearing behaviors, gender and role responsibilities and expectations. The primary determination of abuse is that it is dependent on some form of a relationship that is used to meet the needs of the more powerful person, either a member of the family, a teacher, or a friend. Research guides much of the definitions that are based in understanding the impact of certain behaviors.

### Physical abuse

- Inflicting physical injury on a child by other than accidental means, causing skin bruising, burns, disfigurement, impairment of physical or emotional health, or loss or impairment of any bodily function, death; and/or
- Creating a substantial risk of physical harm to a child's bodily functioning; and/or
- Committing acts that are cruel or inhumane regardless of observable injury. Such acts may include, but are not limited to, instances of extreme discipline demonstrating a disregard of a child's pain and/or mental suffering; and/or
- Assaulting or criminally mistreating a child as defined by either the criminal code or school policy; and/or
- Engaging in actions or omissions resulting in injury to, or creating a substantial risk to the physical or mental health or development of a child; and/or
- Failing to take reasonable steps to prevent the occurrence of any of the above.

#### 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, ping pong paddle, hand)
- Injuries that regularly appear after 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 mental health or development of a child; and/or
- Failing to take reasonable steps to prevent the occurrence of any of the above.

### Neglect

The failure to provide for a child's basic needs within their own environment.

#### Furthermore, neglect may be:

- Physical (e.g., failure to provide necessary food or shelter, or lack of appropriate supervision – this would include failure to provide proper adult guardianship, such as leaving children unsupervised at home for any extended period of time).

#### 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
- Both parents or legal guardian are absent from Abidjan for any period of 24 hours or greater
- Parents cannot be reached in the case of an emergency

**Note:** ICSA requires one adult to be a full-time resident of Abidjan. Should parents/guardians leave the country for any reason, the responsibility for informing the school of all appropriate contact details lies with the parent or guardian. Temporary Change of Guardian information should be emailed to the relevant Principal.

- Medical (e.g., failure to provide necessary medical or mental health treatment); and/or
- Emotional (e.g., a pattern of actions, such as: inattention to a child’s emotional needs, failure to provide psychological care, or permitting the child to use alcohol or other drugs, specific examples may include verbal humiliation, refusing to acknowledge presence of child, invasion of privacy for no specific reason, violent threats, etc.).

## Emotional abuse

The persistent emotional ill treatment of a child so as to cause severe and adverse effects on a child’s emotional development.

- **It may involve:** conveying to children that they are worthless or unloved; that they are inadequate or valued only if they meet the needs of another person; age or developmentally inappropriate expectations being imposed on children; causing children frequently to feel frightened; the exploitation or corruption of child’s innocence. Some level of emotional abuse is involved in all types of ill-treatment of a child, though it may also occur alone.

### Possible indicators of Emotional abuse:

- Physical, mental and emotional development is delayed
- Highly anxious
- Showing delayed speech or sudden speech disorder
- Fear of new situations
- Low self-esteem
- Inappropriate emotional responses to painful situations
- Extremes of passivity or aggression
- Drug or alcohol abuse
- Chronic running away
- Compulsive stealing
- Obsessions or phobias
- Sudden under-achievement or lack of concentration
- Attention seeking behavior
- Persistent tiredness
- Lying

## Sexual abuse

Committing or allowing to be committed any sexual offense against a child as defined in either the criminal code of the host country or school policy, or intentionally touching either directly or through clothing, the genitals, anus, or breasts of a child for other than hygiene or child care purposes.

- Sexual abuse has some different characteristics of child abuse that warrant special attention. While physical abuse is often the result of immediate stress and not usually planned, sexual abuse requires planning with results that are more insidious.

### 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 complaints
- Not wanting to be alone with an individual
- Pregnancy, especially at a young age
- Extremely protective parenting

The planning, referred to as child sexual exploitation or grooming, often results in victims accepting the blame, responsibility, guilt and shame for the sexual behavior of the offender. Sexual abuse requires far more secrecy than other forms of child abuse, so is more difficult to report.

## Child Sexual Exploitation (Grooming) <sup>1</sup>

The use of a variety of manipulative and controlling techniques with a vulnerable subject used in a range of settings to establish trust and/or normalise sexually harmful behaviour with the overall aim of facilitating abuse and/or prohibiting exposure. <sup>1</sup>

- Grooming may happen over long periods of time or rapidly. It may include manipulation of family members, colleagues, and organizational practices in addition to victims. <sup>1</sup>
- Many victims, through the process of grooming, are taught that the sex is a form of love, so tend to love their offender and often present as happy and well-adjusted children with no negative symptoms because of their perception of being loved.

### Possible indicators of grooming <sup>3</sup>

- May be involved in relationships or hang out with older people and antisocial towards children their own age
- Possibly go missing from home or school
- Spends time at places of concern like hotels or others homes without a reason to visit a child their own age
- May be involved in petty crime
- Unexplained injuries
- Sudden change in the way they look, dress or act
- Excessive amounts of time online
- New found access to expensive facility or things
- Online activity is secretive, online history is consistently deleted

## Working with the sexual offender cannot be done by school counselors.

## Peer on Peer Abuse <sup>2</sup>

Any form of physical, sexual, emotional and financial abuse, and coercive control, exercised between children, and within children's relationships (both intimate and non intimate), friendships and wider peer associations. <sup>2</sup>

- Peer-on-peer abuse can take various forms, including (but not limited to): serious bullying (including cyberbullying), relationship abuse, domestic violence and abuse, child sexual exploitation, youth and serious youth violence, harmful sexual behaviour, and/or prejudice-based violence including, but not limited to, gender-based violence. <sup>2</sup>
- Examples of online peer-on-peer abuse would include sexting, online abuse, peer-on-peer grooming, the distribution of youth involved sexualised content, and harassment. <sup>2</sup>

### Possible indicators of Peer on Peer Abuse <sup>3</sup>

- failing to attend school, disengaging from classes or struggling to carry out school related tasks to the standard ordinarily expected,
- Physical injuries
- Experiencing difficulties with mental health and/or emotional wellbeing
- Becoming withdrawn and/or shy; experiencing headaches, stomach aches, anxiety and/or panic attacks; suffering from nightmares or lack of sleep or sleeping too much
- Broader changes in behaviour including alcohol or substance misuse
- Changes in appearance and/or starting to act in a way that is not appropriate for the child's age
- Abusive behaviour towards others.

<sup>1</sup> Farrer & Co Managing allegations of child abuse by educators and other adults- protocol for international schools (<https://www.farrer.co.uk/globalassets/clients-and-sectors/safeguarding/farrer--co-safeguarding-peer-on-peer-abuse-toolkit-2019.pdf>) (Accessed July 2021)

<sup>2</sup> Farrer & Co Peer on Peer Abuse Toolkit (<https://www.farrer.co.uk/globalassets/clients-and-sectors/safeguarding/farrer--co-safeguarding-peer-on-peer-abuse-toolkit-2019.pdf>) (Accessed July 2021)

<sup>3</sup> Stockholm International School Child Protection Policy

*What happens when a teacher has reasonable cause to believe?*

These possible indicators of abuse and neglect (previous pages) will be used by the staff member as a guideline for reporting to the designated safeguarding lead (DSL), who will determine if the case needs further attention.

A report must be made when a staff member has reasonable cause to believe that a child has suffered abuse or neglect. All reports are confidential.

*Behavioral indicators in and of themselves do not constitute abuse or neglect. Together with other indicators, such as family dynamics, they may warrant a referral.*

## Procedures: Preparing for a Disclosure

Adults working with children must understand and know how to respond appropriately to disclosures from students. It is important that employees listen carefully to students, giving them the time they need to talk about what happened to them and how they are feeling. Students often cannot easily talk about an abuse problem because they may:

- Try to forget in order to cope
- Worry they will lose the love of their parents or friends
- Fear the shame of abuse or getting in trouble for telling (especially older children)
- Be under threat by the offender to harm them or their family

Understanding these fears of disclosure will help you in your response. Respond calmly and matter-of-factly. Even if the story that the student tells you is difficult to hear, it is important not to register disgust or alarm.

### **Do:**

- Accept what the student tells you, even though your first reaction may be, “This can’t be true.” It is very unlikely the student will make up an abuse experience, particularly a sexual abuse experience. It is important to report to the designated safeguarding lead or counselor immediately. Ask the student to accompany you to the office.
- Affirm the student by acknowledging the importance of talking about the abuse and getting help. Do not assume that the student knows how to talk about it.
- Support the student. Reinforce that a student who has been victimized is not to blame.
- Empower the student. A victim often feels helpless and powerless. Affirm and support feelings: listen to fears, concerns and needs; and assure that every effort will be made to keep them safe.

### **Don’t:**

- Do not promise the student that “you won’t tell” – You are required to tell.
- Do not let a student swear you to secrecy before telling you something you may need to report.
- Do not lead the student in telling (just listen, letting him/her explain in his/her own words).
- Do not pressure the student for a great amount of detail.
- Do not make judgmental or disparaging comments about the offender - it is often someone the student loves or with whom he/she is close.
- Do not make promises to the student that things will get better.
- Do not confront the offender.



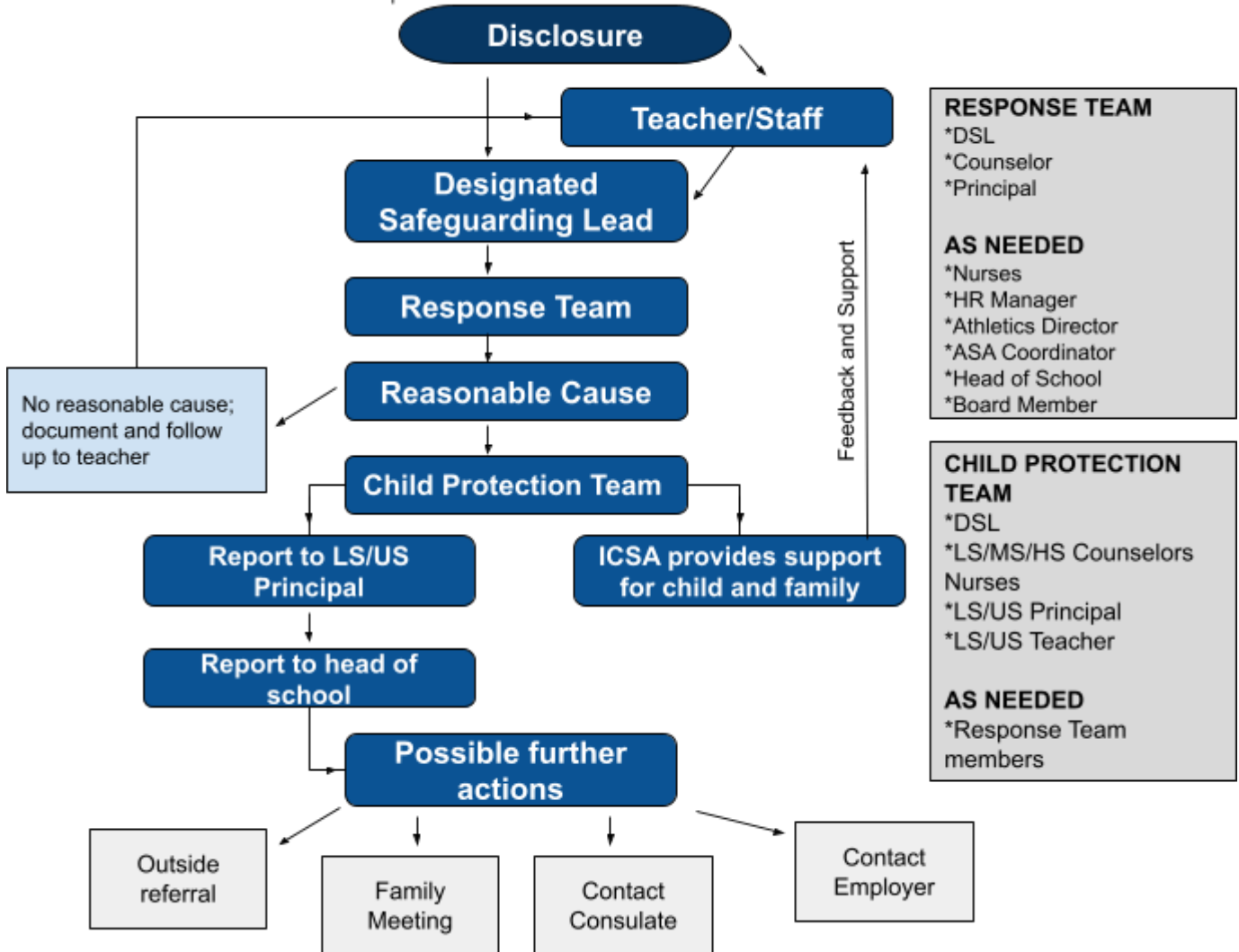
Share with the designated safeguarding lead (DSL) or administrator, but limit information to other staff. Explain to the student that you must tell someone else to get help. Try to let the student know that someone else might also need to talk with him/her and explain why. If the student does not want to go home, this should be considered an emergency. Report to the designated safeguarding lead or principal immediately.

## Procedures: Reporting Suspected Child Abuse or Neglect

Where there is cause to suspect child abuse or neglect, it is the responsibility of the staff member to report his or her suspicions to the designated safeguarding lead, or to the principal. In all cases, the principal will be notified. It is the responsibility of the principal to inform the head of school of the suspected case of child abuse or neglect.

All staff, faculty, and administrators are mandated to report incidences of abuse and neglect. All ICSA employees are also required to report suspicion of abuse or neglect. All reports of abuse and neglect must be made to the designated safeguarding lead within 48 hours for immediate response.

## Steps Followed After a Disclosure



## Step 1: Disclosure and Information Gathering

Following a disclosure, the designated safeguarding lead will take initial steps to gather information regarding the reported incident and will meet with the division principal and grade level counselor (and other members of the response team as needed) to address the concern. In all cases, follow-up activities will be conducted in a manner that ensures that information is documented factually and that strict confidentiality is maintained. The following procedure will be used:

1. Interview staff members as necessary and document information relative to the case
2. Consult with school personnel to review the child's history in the school
3. Determine the course of follow-up actions (i.e. see Disclosure Flowchart)

## Step 2: Response

The School shall take all reports of abuse seriously. In response to suspected abuse, the School shall take reasonable, responsible and legal steps to protect the child. The Principal has a coordinating role and has the additional task of ensuring confidentiality and keeping the Director informed as appropriate. The counselor is the

designated person with regards to student contact. In all decisions, the protection and safety of the child will remain the foremost concern.

*In the event that the abuse or neglect allegation involves a staff or faculty member of ICSEA, the division principal must be informed. The SLT will follow School Policy pursuant to ethical professional behavior.*

*If the designated safeguarding lead or Principal is in any way involved in the suspicions, the employee must report to the Director. If the Director is in any way involved in the suspicions, the employee must report to the Chair of the Board. The Chair shall bring the matter to a Closed Session of the Board.*

*School counselors will handle most cases of suspected abuse or neglect, such as those involving:*

- Student relationships with peers
- Parenting skills related to disciplining children at home
- Student-parent relationships
- Mental health issues such as depression, low self-esteem, grieving

*Some cases will be referred to outside resources, for example:*

- Mental health issues such as depression, psychosis, dissociation, suicide ideation
- Cases reported for investigation and outside resources include: severe and ongoing physical abuse or neglect, sexual abuse and incest

*In extreme cases when families do not stop the abuse or concerns remain about the safety of the child, reports could be made to:*

- Local authorities
- The consulate
- The employer
- The home-of-record welfare office

### Step 3: Support

Subsequent to a reported and/or substantiated case of child abuse or neglect:

- The counselor will maintain contact with the child and family to provide support and guidance as appropriate
- The counselor will provide the child's teachers and the principal with ongoing support
- The counselor will provide resource materials and strategies for teachers
- The counselor will maintain contact with outside therapists to update the progress of the child in school

All documentation of the investigation will be kept in the child's confidential file. Confidential records may only be released with parent consent. One exception to this is if the School believes the child continues to be at risk. In these cases, ICSA has the responsibility to relay potential safety concerns to the new school.

## Child abuse prevention

In order to protect the students and staff of the School:

- The School shall conduct a comprehensive verification of previous employment of any applicant.
- The Director shall establish regulations for staff and volunteers for the prevention, reporting, investigation and follow up of (suspected) child maltreatment, and shall ensure that particular care is taken with respect to the collection of evidence in a confidential matter.
- The Director shall ensure that the School staff is periodically informed and educated regarding the symptoms of child abuse, reporting obligations and appropriate regulations for dealing with such issues in the School environment.

The Director shall periodically undertake a review of policies and regulations in the following areas as part of the effort to prevent child abuse.

- Guidelines for field trips involving overnight accommodation
- Guidelines for appropriate conduct between students and staff
- Educational programs on child protection issues
- Educational programs on human sexuality
- Criteria for screening School volunteers
- Privacy guidelines.

## Child Protection Key Contacts

### School Contact

- Mrs. Maipelo N'Guessan  
Designated Safeguarding Lead  
Email: [mnguessan@icsabidjan.org](mailto:mnguessan@icsabidjan.org)

### Local Child protection Contacts

- Sous-direction Chargée de la lutte contre la traite des enfants et la Délinquance Juvénile (Child Protection Police Unit)  
+225 01 59 70 32
- Direction de l'Adoption et de la Protection des droits de l'Enfant, Ministère de la Femme, de la Famille et de l'Enfant (Child Protection division, Ministry of Women, Family and Children)  
+225 20 32 42 33
- Allo enfant en détresse numéro verte (Childline toll free number)  
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DATE OF ADOPTION:

DATE OF IMPLEMENTATION: August 28, 2017

REVISIONS: January 2021, July 2021

## The ICSA child protection policy works for the child, for the family, and for our community

Research indicates that international communities are as prone to child abuse as communities in people's home country. Child abuse is a multifaceted issue that involves dynamics of the child, the family, and the community. The ICSA Child Protection Policy works to respond at all three levels.

