



# Child Protection Policy

2015

**Vision:** The Overseas School of Colombo shall be a model of excellence in education, nurturing and empowering our community of learners to achieve global success.

**Mission:** The Overseas School of Colombo, *an IB World School*, is committed to guiding our global community toward international and intercultural understanding. OSC develops the whole person as a responsible learner, striving for personal excellence within a culturally diverse environment.

Child abuse and neglect are growing concerns in schools throughout the world and are violations of a child's human rights. Research indicates that international communities are as prone to child abuse as communities in their home country. Abuse and neglect are obstacles to a child's education as well as their physical, emotional, and spiritual development.

Schools fill a special institutional role in society as protectors of children and need to ensure that all children in their care are afforded a safe and secure environment in which to grow and develop. Educators, having the opportunity to observe and interact with children over time, are in a unique position to identify children who need help and protection. As such, educators have a professional and ethical obligation to identify children who are in need of help and protection and to take steps to ensure that the child and family avail themselves of the services needed to remedy any situation that constitutes child abuse or neglect.

All staff employed at OSC must report suspected incidences of child abuse or neglect whenever the staff member has reasonable cause to believe that a child has suffered or is at risk of suffering abuse or neglect. Reporting and follow up of all suspected incidences of child abuse or neglect will proceed in accordance with administrative regulations respective to this policy. Furthermore, cases of suspected child abuse or neglect may be reported to the appropriate employer, or to the respective consulate in Colombo, or to the appropriate child protection agency in Sri Lanka, and/or to local authorities.

In alignment with the Overseas School of Colombo's (OSC) Vision of 'nurturing, empowering our community of learners and developing the whole person' OSC has implemented this child protection policy to guide our staff and families in matters of child health, safety and care. The OSC Child Protection Policy is based on international law and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child of which Sri Lanka was a signatory in 1991. The two key articles 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. [\(Child Rights International Network\)](#)

The majority of Sri Lanka's child protection laws are over 40 years old. Sri Lanka defines child abuse as all acts of sexual violence against children, trafficking children, cruelty to children and the use of children in obscene publications and exploitative labor.\* The laws relating to sexual offences against children were amended in 1995 requiring that sexual acts with children under the age of consent, 16, be prosecuted under the offence of statutory rape or under Article 365 of the penal code which defines unnatural sexual acts and grave abuse.\*\* The law which outlaws cruelty to children was established in 1939 and was also amended to the Penal Code in 1995. Unfortunately, extreme forms of corporal punishment in homes and schools remain prevalent and legal (Perera).

Although Sri Lankan courts are considered to have unrestrained jurisdiction to interfere with parental rights in favor of the best interests of the child, there are very few reports of abuse or neglect. As a result the court seldom has the opportunity to assist children or terminate parental rights.

In 1999, the National Child Protection Authority was founded to address child abuse in Sri Lanka. The Authority is made up of local monitoring and child protection committees. According to the U.N. Committee on the Rights of the Child, these local committees are not well organized and their roles are not clearly defined (Representing Children Worldwide).

### **Accreditation Requirements:**

In addition, accreditation organizations are addressing the issue of protecting children as demonstrated from the statements of the Council of International School (CIS) and the Middle States Association (MSA) which recognize OSC. The new requirements are as follows:

“To reflect evolving programs and practices in the areas of Child Protection and related issues as well as the continuity of learning programs in exceptional circumstances, CIS and MSA are introducing a specific number of amendments to the Accreditation Standards and Indicators contained in the 8th Edition of the “Guide to School Evaluation and Accreditation”. These amendments will apply to all schools, whatever their position in the accreditation cycle, from 1st January 2013 onwards.

#### **Standard D1**

The school shall have faculty and support staff that are sufficient in numbers and with the qualifications, competencies and sound moral character necessary to carry out the school's programs, services, and activities, to support fulfilment of the mission and objectives, and to ensure student protection and well-being.

#### **Indicator D1a**

Recruitment and screening processes are in place to ensure that employees in all categories are appropriately qualified and of sound moral character.

#### **Indicator E4b**

A culture of shared responsibility for the social and emotional well-being and protection of students is promoted by the school leadership and teachers through programs to address awareness, prevention and responsiveness to issues such as sexual harassment, substance abuse, hazing and bullying, and discrimination in any form.

#### **Indicator G4b**

Appropriate and regularly reviewed arrangements exist to cover threats to the security of people and premises as well as to support – to the extent possible - program continuity under exceptional circumstances.

All updated accreditation documentation showing the above-mentioned changes will be designated as “Version 8.1”.

The Overseas School of Colombo will distribute this policy annually to all parents and applicants, will communicate this policy annually to students, will provide annual training for all staff, and will make every effort to implement hiring practices to ensure the safety of OSC's children. In the case of a staff member reported as an alleged offender, the Overseas School of Colombo will conduct a full investigation following a carefully designed course of due process.

Parents at OSC, are expected to work in partnership with the school and abide by

the policies adopted by the OSC Board. All OSC staff will join that partnership in providing for the safety and care of our children. It is for this reason that the Overseas School of Colombo has endorsed a Child Protection Policy that defines the standards by which all OSC students ought to be treated with respect and dignity at all times.

### **Definition of Child Abuse and Neglect**

OSC is a culturally diverse community with multiple beliefs, values and practices. In order to respect all beliefs we embrace the World Health Organization's (WHO) definitions of abuse and neglect:

*“Child abuse or maltreatment constitutes all forms of physical and/or emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, resulting in actual or potential harm to the child's health, survival, development or dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust or power.”* (World Health Organization ).

A person may abuse a child by inflicting harm, or by failing to act to prevent harm. Children may be abused in a family or in a school or community setting. Children may be abused by individuals known to them or more rarely, by a stranger.

Usually, child abuse is inflicted by someone the child knows, respects or trusts. International school communities have unique characteristics of which school personnel must be aware in terms of the individuals who are around our children. School personnel should be knowledgeable of the potential reasons why children may not be able to talk about any victimization they might have experienced.

To improve OSC community awareness, this policy focuses on four categories of abuse and the physical and behavioral signs associated with each type.

### **Abuse Definitions:**

**Physical Abuse:** Physical abuse of a child is that which results in actual or potential physical harm from an interaction or lack of an interaction, which is reasonably within the control of a parent or person in a position of responsibility, power or trust. There may be single or repeated incidents.

Physical abuse could include but is not limited to:

- Kicking
- Shaking
- Pushing
- Throwing
- Suffocating
- Biting
- Poisoning
- Drowning
- Burning

Possible indicators\* of physical abuse:

- Unexplained bruises, welts, cuts or fractures on any part of the body

- Bruises of different ages or colors
- Injuries reflecting the shape of an object
- Injuries that regularly appear after absences
- Unexplained burns or burns with a pattern
- Injuries inconsistent with the information given by the child
- Bald patches where hair may have been torn out
- Fear of going home or having someone call home
- May flinch if touched unexpectedly
- Extremely aggressive or withdrawn
- Poor sleeping patterns, frequent nightmares
- Poor memory and concentration
- Changes in emotion and/or behavior

*\*Indicators in and of themselves do not constitute abuse or neglect. Together with other indicators and concerns they may warrant a referral.*

**Emotional Abuse:** a pattern of behavior where a child is subjected to continuous and hurtful verbal abuse, which disregards a child's emotional well-being.

Emotional abuse could include but is not limited to:

- Excessive Criticism
- Negative comparisons
- Insults
- Rejection
- Put downs
- Harmful threats
- Inappropriate expectations
- Yelling
- Swearing

Possible indicators\* of emotional abuse:

- Fear of failing
- Fear of consequences, can lead to lying
- Mood swings, withdrawal or aggressiveness
- Mental or emotional development lags
- Social Isolation
- Low self-esteem, depression
- Frequent psychosomatic complaints, headaches, stomach aches, nausea
- Bedwetting and/or diarrhea

*\*Indicators in and of themselves do not constitute abuse or neglect. Together with other indicators and concerns they may warrant a referral.*

**Neglect:** Chronic or persistent failure to meet a child's basic physical or psychological needs in the context of resources reasonably available to the family.

Neglect could include but is not limited to:

- Inadequate food, shelter and clothing
- Lack of hygiene
- Not protecting a child from other forms of abuse
- Lack of supervision by a parent or legal guardian
- Not providing needed medical treatment
- Emotional isolation, lack of affection/attention
- Failure to support a child's educational needs

Possible indicators\* of neglect:

- Child is hungry or inadequately dressed or unwashed
- Parents are uninterested in child's academic performance
- Parents do not respond to repeated communications from the school
- Parents or legal guardian are absent for more than 24 hours^
- Parent cannot be reached in the case of an emergency
- Child does not want to go home, feels lonely and uncared for at home
- Unattended medical or dental needs
- Developmental delays
- Irregular or nonattendance in school
- Demands constant attention and affection
- Regularly displays fatigue or listlessness
- Self-destructive behaviors
- Lack of trust in others

*\*Indicators in and of themselves do not constitute abuse or neglect. Together with other indicators and concerns they may warrant a referral.*

^OSC policy requires a parent or legal guardian be in Colombo continually. If the parents/legal guardian leave Colombo for any reason, a temporary guardianship must be on record.

**Sexual abuse:** committing or allowing to be committed any sexual offense against a child as defined in either the criminal code of Sri Lanka or school policy, or intentionally touching either directly or through clothing, the genital, anus, or breasts of a child for other than hygiene or child care purposes. Sexual abuse entails planning or "Grooming", which results in victims accepting the blame, responsibility, guilt and shame for the sexual behavior of the offender.

Sexual abuse could include but is not limited to:

- Penetrative or non-penetrative sexual acts
- Sexual intercourse, anal or oral sex
- Touching of genitals or breasts
- Undressing or exposing oneself
- Forced viewing of sexual acts, genitals, or pornographic media
- Developmentally inappropriate conversations about sexual content
- The exploitation of a child in prostitution or other unlawful sexual practices

Possible indicators\* of sexual abuse:

- Sexual knowledge, behavior or language not appropriate to age level
- Child indicating a “secret, special” friend
- Unusual relationship patterns
- Sexually transmitted infection in a child of any age
- Frequent urinary tract infections in both boys and girls
- Evidence of physical trauma or bleeding to the oral, genital or anal areas
- Difficulty in walking or sitting
- Bedwetting
- Not wanting to be alone with an individual
- Pregnancy especially at a young age
- Extremely protective parenting
- Having secrets that they cannot tell anyone about
- Reluctance to change into PE clothes, fear of bathrooms
- Behavioral/emotional disturbances

*\*Indicators in and of themselves do not constitute abuse or neglect. Together with other indicators and concerns they may warrant a referral.*

**OSC’s response to suspected abuse:** All staff, faculty and administrators are required to report incidences or suspicions of abuse or neglect. When there is cause to suspect child abuse has or is occurring, any suspicion must be reported to the school counselor assigned to that student or to the principal within 48 hours. All cases reported will be taken seriously and investigated within 24 hours.

In order to gather information the counselor may:

- Consult with teachers
- Observe a child
- Talk with a child to gain more information
- Have child write, draw or role play
- Refer to the doctor/nurse for examination
- Consult with parents to present OSC’s concerns

All information will be documented factually, and strict confidentiality will be maintained. When there is reasonable cause, the counselor will inform the principal, who will communicate these concerns to the Head of School. The Head of School will inform the Board of the investigation and outcome. A Student Response Team (SRT) will be formed:

- Counselor
- Principal
- Doctor/Nurse

The school, in collaboration with the parents, will manage most cases of suspected abuse. School counselors provide a variety of services for the students and parents, including:

- Supporting students to build self-esteem and healthy peer relationships
- Referral to mental health providers for individual and family counseling

The Head of School will determine all possible options and next steps regarding the investigation. This might include direct contact with the following parties but is not limited to:

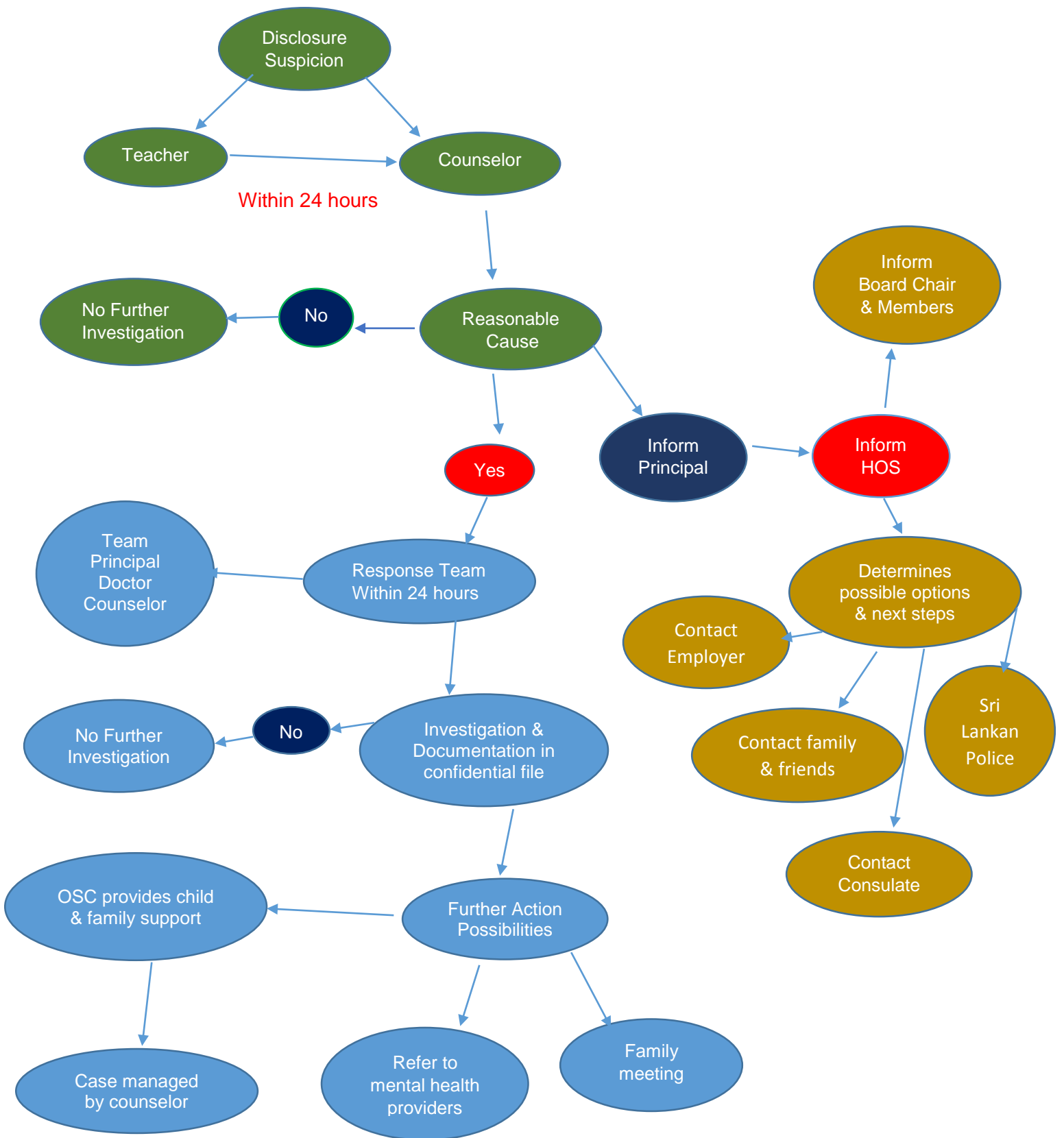
- The family
- Sri Lankan Authorities
- Parent Embassy/Consulate
- Parent Employer

The counselor will maintain contact and with the child, family, relevant teachers and SRT members, and outside service providers to provide a network of support for the child, family and teachers.

All cases of child abuse will be documented and stored in the child's confidential file. When a child transitions from OSC to another school, the counselor will make every attempt to have a confidential counselor-counselor conversation in order to protect the child.



## Procedure to Follow for Possible Child Abuse or Neglect



**Reporting Contacts:****Sri Lankan National Child Protection Authority**

Special Investigation Police – top floor  
330 Thalawathugoda Road  
Madiweha Sri Jayawardenapura

Anoma Dissanyake – Chair person  
011 277 8911 ext. 1211

**United State Embassy**

U.S. Embassy  
No. 210, A2  
Colombo  
Ann M. Tsewole, MS, FNP-BC  
11 249 8500 ext 8765

**Canadian High Commission**

33A, 5th Lane,  
Colpetty  
Colombo 03, Sri Lanka  
Tel.: 00 94 11 522 62 32

**Indian High Commission**

High Commission of India  
36-38 Galle Road  
Colombo 3  
Mr. Arindam Bagchi  
Deputy High Commissioner  
011 244 0235

**Australian High Commission**

21, Srimath R. G.  
Senanayake Mawatha  
Colombo 7  
Tel.: +94 (0) 11 2463200

**British High Commission**

389, Bauddhaloka  
  
Mw, Colombo 7  
Tel.: 94 11 5390639

**Responding to Students Who Disclose Abuse:** Believe what the child tells you even though your first reaction may be, “This can’t be true.” It is very unlikely the child will make up an abuse experience, particularly sexual abuse. Follow these steps:

- **LISTEN** to the child, the story, fears, concerns, needs
- Do not question for details
- Support/empower the child
- Reinforce that the child is the victim, not to blame self, may feel helpless and powerless
- Do **not** promise the child that ‘you won’t tell’ – You are **required** to
- It is important to report to the counselor immediately, ask student to accompany you

The majority of suspected abuse or neglect cases will be supervised by the school counselors. These include:

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

Potential outside referrals include:

- Mental health issues such as depression, psychosis, dissociation, suicide ideation
- Severe and ongoing physical abuse or neglect
- Sexual abuse and incest

In cases where the abuse continues or child safety concerns continue, reports could be made to:

- Parent consulate/embassy
- Parent employer
- Home-of-record welfare office

Child abuse is a multi-faceted issue that involves dynamics of the child, the family and the community. The OSC Child Protection Policy works to respond at all three levels.

## Works Cited

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Representing Children Worldwide. *How Children's Voices Are Heard In Child Protective Hearings*. November 2005. 29 September 2015. <<http://www.law.yale.edu/rcw/rcw/jurisdictions/assc/srilanka/frontpage.htm>>.

World Health Organization . *Child Maltreatment*. December 2014. 29 September 2015. <<http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs150/en/>>.