

Child Safeguarding Policy

Introduction

In keeping with our school mission and values, OSC believes that every child and young person, regardless of age, has at all times and in all situations a right to feel safe and protected, and we are committed to safeguarding and protecting students from harm. Please take time to read the following guidelines which are intended to safeguard all members of the OSC community as well as visitors to our campus.

At OSC, safeguarding policies and procedures encompass: student wellbeing; bullying; harassment and discrimination; use of physical intervention / safe handling; meeting the individual physical, psychological or medical needs of students; drug and substance misuse; educational visits; relationships, body safety and comprehensive sexuality education; online safety; the welfare of students and learners during school expeditions; and safe staff selection processes.

Safeguarding Policy Statement

The Overseas School of Colombo is committed to safeguarding and protecting students from harm. Our definition of safeguarding includes the process of protecting students from abuse and neglect, preventing risk of harm to children's health or development, and ensuring children grow up with the provision of safe and supportive care.

Safeguarding Policy Rationale

In alignment with our school vision of "nurturing and empowering our community of learners and developing the whole person", OSC has implemented this child safeguarding policy to guide our staff and families in matters of child health, safety, and care. The OSC Child Safeguarding Policy is based on the recommendations of the International Task Force on Child Protection, 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).

Safeguarding Policy Expectations

OSC will distribute this policy annually to all families 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.



At OSC, child safeguarding is everyone's responsibility.

OSC expects all individuals and groups affiliated with the school community to act with integrity and to take responsibility for keeping students safe. This policy is binding for all who have contact with the school community, including staff, service and activity partners, volunteers, associated agencies, interns, contractors, guests, parents, caretakers, and visitors. In keeping with this expectation, applicants for positions at OSC must be willing to undergo child protection screening appropriate to the post, including checks with past employers. Families 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 students. It is for this reason that OSC has endorsed a Safeguarding Policy that defines the standards by which all OSC students ought to be treated with respect and dignity at all times.

Definitions and Clarifications

Child: While the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* defines a child as a person under the age of 18 years, at OSC we define *child* as any student of the school or child visitor to the school. We recognise that some members of our school community are more vulnerable than others due to their personal circumstances.

Child abuse is the term used to describe different types of maltreatment inflicted upon a child or young person digitally or otherwise.

Child protection is part of the safeguarding process. It focuses on protecting individual children where there are concerns about abuse. This includes child protection procedures which detail how to respond to concerns about a child.

Safeguarding is not just about protecting students from deliberate harm; it is linked to welfare and what we do for all children. Safeguarding involves the process of protecting children from abuse and neglect, preventing harm to children's health or development, and ensuring children grow up with the provision of safe and effective care.

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:

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 (WHO).

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. Personnel should be aware of the unique characteristics of an international school in terms of the individuals who are around our children and our potential for responding to situations. School personnel should be knowledgeable of the potential reasons why children may not feel able to talk about the type of victimization they might have experienced.

Child abuse includes non-accidental physical injury, neglect, sexual abuse and emotional or psychological abuse. In its most serious forms, abuse can lead to death or developmental harm to



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the physical or emotional well being of a child or young person. OSC policy focuses on these four categories of abuse and the physical and behavioral signs associated with each type.

Abuse Definitions

Physical Abuse generally refers to the non-accidental use of physical force against a child which results in actual or potential physical harm from an interaction or lack of an interaction, and 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:

Biting	Burning	Drowning	Hitting	Kicking
Poisoning	Punching	Pushing	Shaking	Shoving
Slapping	Spitting	Strangling	Suffocating	Throwing

Possible indicators* of physical abuse:

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

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

Emotional/Psychological Abuse refers to a parent or caregiver’s pattern of failure to provide a child with non-physical nurture, emotional support, or availability. It is a pattern of behavior where a child is subjected to continuous and hurtful verbal and emotional abuse, which disregards a child’s emotional well-being. Emotional/Psychological abuse could include but is not limited to:

Allowing the child to witness violence within immediate environment	Corrupting the child to engage in destructive antisocial behavior	Excessive criticism, insults, negative comparisons, and put-downs	Ignoring and depriving child of essential stimulation & responsiveness	Inappropriate expectations, harmful threats, and rejection
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Isolating the child from normal social experiences and friendships	Neglecting the legitimacy of the child's needs	Refusing to acknowledge the child's worth and rejecting the legitimacy of the child's needs	Stifling emotional growth and intellectual development	Terrorizing through yelling, verbal assaults, swearing, and bullying, creating a climate of fear
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Possible indicators* of emotional/psychological abuse:

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

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

Neglect is 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:

Abandonment: when a caregiver leaves a child alone for more than a reasonable period and does not provide for the presence of alternative age-appropriate care	Educational neglect: characterised by a caregiver's failure to provide an education and the tools required to participate in the education system	Emotional neglect: characterised by a lack of caregiver warmth, nurturance, encouragement and support; emotional isolation
Medical neglect: characterised by a caregiver's failure to provide appropriate medical care; could occur through a failure to acknowledge the seriousness of an illness or condition, or the deliberate withholding of appropriate care	Physical neglect: characterised by the caregiver's failure to provide basic physical necessities, such as safe, clean and adequate clothing, housing, food and health care; lack of hygiene	Supervisory neglect: characterised by lack of supervision by parent or legal guardian, absence or inattention, which can lead to physical harm or injury, sexual abuse or, in an older child, permitting criminal behaviour

Possible indicators* of neglect

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

**Indicators in and of themselves do not constitute abuse or neglect. Together with other indicators and concerns*



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^OSC policy requires a parent or legal guardian to be living with the child continually. If the parents/legal guardian leave the family home for more than 24 hours, the school must be informed of the temporary guardian who must be residing with the child over that period. OSC does not support students being left with a guardian for significant periods of time and may review a child's enrollment if parents are not meeting expectations of care.

Sexual abuse refers to the involvement of a child in sexual activity that s/he does not fully comprehend, is unable to give informed consent to, or that violates the laws or social taboos of society. Sexual abuse entails planning or grooming, which results in victims accepting the blame, responsibility, guilt and shame for the sexual behavior of the offender. It relates specifically where there is a power differential and the activity is intended to gratify or satisfy the needs of an adult or older child in a position of power, responsibility, trust or authority. (*Report of the Consultation on Child Abuse Prevention, Geneva, 29-31 March 1999, World Health Organization, Social Change and Mental Health, Violence and Injury Prevention*).

Sexual abuse could include but is not limited to:

Developmentally inappropriate conversations about sexual content, online or otherwise	Exploitation of a child in prostitution or other unlawful sexual practices, online or otherwise	Forced viewing of sexual acts, genitals, or pornography, online or otherwise	Intentionally touching, either directly or through clothing, the genitals, anus, or breasts for reasons other than hygiene or child care purposes
Online grooming through social media or accessing, producing, or distributing child exploitation material, even where there is no sexual interest in kids	Planning sexual acts or grooming a child for future acts, online or otherwise	Penetrative or non-penetrative sexual acts; sexual intercourse, anal or oral sex	Undressing or exposing oneself to the child, online or otherwise

Possible indicators* of sexual abuse:

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

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

Peer-on-Peer Abuse can manifest itself in many ways where *peer* is considered as within the same age range. It can include sexual bullying, being coerced to send sexual images, sexual assault and



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teenage relationship abuse. Any indication that a student at OSC is victim to or has suffered from peer-on-peer abuse will be managed in accordance with the practices outlined in the OSC Behaviour Policy.

Response to Suspected Abuse

All staff, faculty, and administrators are required to report incidences or suspicions of abuse. All reports will be immediately referred to the Child Protection Officer and investigations will begin within 24 hours. In order to gather information, the Child Protection Officer may:

- Consult with teachers
- Observe a child or delegate an individual to do so
- Talk with a child to gain more information
- Have the 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 Child Protection Officer will inform the Principal, who will communicate these concerns to the Head of School. A Child Protection Case Response Team (CPCRT) will be formed which could include:

- Head of School
- Principal
- Assistant Principal
- Counselor
- Doctor/Nurse
- Classroom teacher or Advisor.

The CPCRT will advise the Head of School who 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 of the child
- Sri Lankan authorities
- Parent/Guardian embassy/consulate
- Parent/Guardian employer
- External medical services or external counseling services.

The counselor will maintain contact and with the child, family, CPCRT members, teachers and outside service providers to furnish 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-to-counselor conversation in order to protect the child.

Response to Students Who Disclose Abuse

Even though a first reaction may be disbelief, it is very important to believe what the child tells us when s/he discloses the abuse. It is very unlikely a child will make up an abuse experience, particularly sexual abuse. In the event a child discloses abuse, all OSC staff, faculty, and administrators will intend to follow these steps:



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- Listen to the child, the story, the fears, concerns, and needs
- Do not ask questions for details at this point
- Support/empower the child
- Reinforce that the child is the victim and should not blame her/himself, that s/he may feel helpless and powerless
- Do not promise the child that you won't tell anyone; all OSC staff, faculty and administrators are contractually and ethically required to report the abuse
- Invite the child to accompany you in reporting the abuse immediately
- Seek support and/or counseling if you find yourself affected by the abuse disclosure.

The CPCRT will make recommendations for ongoing supervision of suspected cases of abuse. Child abuse is a multi-faceted issue that involves dynamics of the child, the family, the school, and the community. The OSC Child Safeguarding Policy works to respond at all levels.

Safeguarding Training

OSC is committed to updating staff on role specific policies and procedures on an annual basis so that all those working with children understand their responsibilities and are familiar with expected practice.

Risk Assessment

All activities and programmes that OSC judges to involve risk of harm to students will undergo a risk assessment.

Adult Visitor Guidelines and Code of Conduct

- OSC supports a culture of mutual respect; all communications should be positive, respectful and inclusive.
- Visitors must display the OSC visitor's pass prominently at all times.
- Permission from OSC must be granted before taking any photos or videos; no images of students may be shared in any social media or online forum; any images of students must be deleted after the permitted purpose is complete.
- Visitors may use toilets designated for adults only; no use of student toilets is permitted.
- Visitors must not take personal information from any student nor give personal information to any student including contact details and social media profiles unless permission is granted.
- Visitors must never be alone with any student nor touch any student nor invade any student's personal space.
- Visitors must not respond to physical contact from any student; if contact occurs, visitors must report it immediately to the Child Protection Officer.
- Visitors must report any suspicious or unacceptable behaviour including physical or verbal abuse by and/or between any student or adult.

Policy Implementation

Implementation of the Child Safeguarding Policy will be the responsibility of the Head of School and the Child Protection Officer, in conjunction with the Principals, to ensure that the policy is fully executed.



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