



American International School
Of Monrovia

CHILD PROTECTION POLICY
MANUAL

Updated MAY 2021



Dear AISM Community and Stakeholders,

Child abuse and neglect are concerns throughout the world and AISM is no exception. Child abuse and neglect are violations of a child's human rights, and are obstacles to the child's education, as well as to their physical and psychological development. We, at the American International School of Monrovia, endorse the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, of which our host country, Liberia, is a signatory.

These two key articles are important, and we wish to draw your attention to them:

· **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.

All staff employed at the American International School of Monrovia are required 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 from 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. Furthermore, cases of suspected child abuse or neglect may be reported to the appropriate employer, to the respective consulate in Monrovia, to the appropriate child protection agency in the home country, and/or to local authorities.

The American International School of Monrovia seeks to be a safe haven for students who may be experiencing abuse or neglect, in any aspect of their lives. As such, upon completion of our revised Child Protection document, the American International School of Monrovia:

- Will distribute this policy annually to all parents and applicants
- Will communicate this policy annually to students
- Will provide training for all staff
- Will make every effort to implement hiring practices to ensure the safety of children

- Will review the policy annually for compliance and effectiveness.

In the event of a staff member reported as an alleged offender, the American International School of Monrovia will conduct a full investigation, following a carefully designed course of due process, while keeping the safety of the child as the highest priority.

For detailed information on the convention on the Rights of Child, see the following link: http://www.unicef.org/crc/index_30160.html

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How are abuse and neglect defined?

Abuse can be defined differently by different cultures, based on their child-rearing practices, gender roles and expectations. AISM uses international recognized definitions of child abuse, based on research, which guides us in understanding the impact of abusive behaviors.

Child Abuse:

According to the World Health Organization, child abuse constitutes “all forms of physical and/or emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect or negligent treatment or commercial or other exploitation, 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.”

Physical abuse:

Physical abuse can be defined as a person inflicting harm, or by failing to act to prevent harm. Children may be abused in a family or in an institutional (e.g. school) or community setting; children may be abused by individuals known to them, or more rarely, by a stranger.

Signs of physical abuse may involve:

- Hitting, punching, shaking, throwing, poisoning, biting, burning or scalding, drowning, suffocating or otherwise causing intentional physical harm to a child. These symptoms could also indicate harm to self, such as, cutting and suicide ideation.
- Improbable excuses given to explain injuries.
- Injuries, which have not received medical attention.
- Injuries that occur to the body in places that are not normally exposed to falls, rough games, etc.
- Repeated urinary infections or unexplained stomach pains
- Refusal to discuss injuries.
- Withdrawal from physical contact; arms and legs kept covered in hot weather.
- Fear of returning home or of parents being contacted.
- Showing wariness or distrust of adults.
- Self-destructive tendencies.
- Being aggressive towards others.
- Being very passive and compliant.
- Chronic running away.

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



Neglect:

Neglect can be defined as the persistent failure of parents and others responsible for the child to meet a child's basic physical or physiological needs, likely to result in serious impairment of the child's health or development.

Some indicators of neglect:

- Medical or mental needs unattended.
- Inattention to child's emotional needs.
- Lack of supervision.
- Consistent hunger.
- Inappropriate dress.
- Poor hygiene.
- Unable to reach parents in an emergency.
- Either parents or legal guardian are absent from Monrovia for any period of 24 hours or more. Parents should contact the school when they are out of town, with contact information and reasons for leaving.
- Parents are uninterested in child's academic performance.
- Child doesn't want to go home.



Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse:

Sexual abuse is committing, or allowing to be committed, any sexual offense against a child, as defined in either the criminal code of Liberia, or the AISM school policy. AISM school policy defines sexual abuse or molestation as persuasion or force of a child under the age of consent (age of consent will be considered to be the universal age of suffrage, which is 18) to engage in sexual acts or imitation of such acts for his or her sexual gratification or sexual arousal.

Non-physical contact:

Non-physical sexual abuse can be characterized as offensive sexual remarks, obscene phone calls, exposure of sexual organs, sexual exploitation of a child such as exhibitionism (getting a child to undress), and showing graphic sexual images such as pornography.

Physical contact:

Physical sexual abuse can be characterized by intentional touching or molesting of body parts of a child with a person or an object for sexual arousal or gratification for self or others, and sexual intercourse with a child.

Possible Indicators of Sexual Abuse:

- Children whose sexual knowledge or behavior is inappropriate to their age level
- Children asking other children to play sexual games or behave sexually
- Children whose writings or drawings focus on sexual images
- Children not wanting to be alone with an individual
- Children with evidence of physical trauma, pain or bleeding to their private areas
- Children who refuse to share their “special secrets” with teachers, administrators, or parents

Note: *These behavioral indicators in and of themselves do not necessarily constitute to sexual abuse or molestation. Together with other indicators, they may warrant a referral to the proper school or government authority.*



CYBERBULLYING

Cyberbullying is oftentimes carried out by children who have access to various forms of technology. Cyberbullying can be defined as any form of bullying that involves electronic technology, such as devices and equipment, cell phones, computers and tablets, as well as communication tools, including social networking sites, messaging apps, gaming sites and chat rooms such as Facebook, Xbox Live, Instagram, YouTube, Snapchat and other chat rooms that can be great fun and a positive experience, text messages, chat, and websites.

Why Cyberbullying is Different

Children who are being cyberbullied are often bullied in person as well. Additionally, kids who are cyberbullied have a harder time getting away from the behavior.

- Cyberbullying can happen 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and reach a kid even when he or she is alone. It can happen any time of the day or night.
- Cyberbullying messages and images can be posted anonymously and distributed quickly to a very wide audience. It can be difficult and sometimes impossible to trace the source.
- Deleting inappropriate or harassing messages, texts, and pictures is extremely difficult after they have been posted or sent.

Indicators of Cyber Bullying:

EMOTIONAL

- Becomes withdrawn or shy
- Shows signs of depression
- Is extremely moody or agitated
- Is anxious or overly stressed out
- Shows signs of aggressive behavior

SOCIAL/BEHAVIORAL

- Suddenly stops using the computer
- Changes eating or sleeping habits (e.g., nightmares)
- No longer wants to participate in activities once enjoyed
- Hurts self, attempts or threatens suicide
- Suddenly changes friends

ACADEMIC

- Doesn't want to go to school
- Gets into trouble at school
- Skips school
- Loses interest in school; drops in grades

Signs that a child may be cyberbullying others:

- Stops using the computer or turns off the screen when someone comes near
- Appears nervous or jumpy when using the computer or cell phone
- Is secretive about what they are doing on the computer
- Spends excessive amounts of time on the computer
- Becomes upset or angry when computer or cell phone privileges are limited or taken away.

When suspected abuse or neglect is reported . . .

It is the responsibility of the staff member to report their suspicions to the principal. It is the responsibility of the principal to inform the director of the suspected case of child abuse or neglect. It is the responsibility of the director to inform the Board Chair/Ambassador's representative.

All staff, faculty and administrators are mandated to report incidences of abuse and neglect. All AISM employees are also required to report suspicion of abuse or neglect. All reports of abuse and neglect must be made to the principal/supervisor within 36 hours for immediate response.

Procedures for reporting suspected cases of abuse, neglect

Step 1

When a child reports abuse or there is reasonable cause to believe that abuse is occurring, the teacher will seek advice from the principal within 36 hours. The Principal will take initial steps to gather information regarding the reported incident. The Principal will confer with the Director on the case of suspected abuse. The Director will form a school-based response team, as needed, to

address the report. The response team will include the principal, the Director, the school nurse, and other individuals the Director sees fit.

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 the school personnel to review the child's history in the school.
- 3) Report status of the case to the Director
- 4) The Director determines the course of follow-up actions.

Step 2

Based on acquired information, a plan of action will be developed by the School-Based Response Team to assist the child and family. Actions that may take place are:

- Discussions between the child and the designated response team member in order to gain more information. Depending upon the age of the child, these discussions may include drawing of pictures and playing with dolls to elicit more information as to what may have occurred
- In-class observations of the child by the designated school-based response team member
- Meetings with the family to present the school's concerns by the Director
- Referral of the student and family to external professional counseling.

In cases of severe abuse or where outside authority is deemed necessary, a request made to the Multidisciplinary Team* (see bottom of the page) may result in further investigation and possible actions:

- Notification of the management of the sponsoring employer of the concern with the child/family.
- Consultation with the consulate of the country of the involved family.
- Consultation with the school or another authority.
- Informal consultation with local authorities.

Step 3:

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

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

All documentation of the investigation will be kept in the child's confidential school records file. Records sent to the schools to which the student may transfer will be flagged to let the receiving school know there is a confidential file for the child. AISM will make every attempt to share this information to protect the child.

*The Multidisciplinary team may consist of the Director, designated member of the board, designated member of the teaching staff, regional security officers, if the case involves US mission families, representative of the Liberian National Police, representative of the Ministry of Gender, assigned psychologist from the Ministry of Health, school nurse, representative from Monrovia Consolidated School System.

Steps followed after Disclosure



