

# CHILD PROTECTION AT AISM



**AISM**  
American International School  
of Mozambique

## **DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE**

As the director of the school, the protection of our learners is the highest priority for everyone of our faculty and staff. We take safety very seriously. All our employees are required to complete a criminal background check prior to employment, they receive ongoing child protection training and serve as mandatory reporters related to any child protection matters.

I hope this guide serves as a re-assuring and helpful document so you know about our policies and processes and you know what to look out for. Child protection is all our responsibility and we must be fully aware of the key signs that a child may be in danger.

Please review this document and keep it handy as a resource. It represents the best practices in international school education in this important area.

Thank you for all you do to make sure our students are safe and in the best possible position to learn.



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# CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

Child abuse and neglect are concerns throughout the world. 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, emotional, and spiritual development. American International School of Mozambique endorses the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, of which our host country, Mozambique (CONFIRM) 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 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 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 the American International School of Mozambique must 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. Furthermore, cases of suspected child abuse or neglect may be reported to the appropriate employer, to the respective consulate or embassy in Maputo, to the appropriate child protection agency in the home country, and/or to local authorities.

The American International School of Mozambique seeks to be a safe haven for students who may be experiencing abuse or neglect in any aspect of their lives. As such, AISM will distribute this 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, the American International School of Mozambique will conduct a full investigation following a carefully designed course of due process, keeping the safety of the child at 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](http://www.unicef.org/crc/index_30160.html)



## 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 need 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 is:

- 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 body 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



**Neglect is** failure to provide for a child's basic needs within their own environment. 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. Note: AISM requires one parent be a full-time resident of Maputo. Should parents/guardian 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 Forms are available from AISM. These are expected to be completed prior to parents/guardians leaving the country); and/or **NEED TO VERIFY THIS**
  - 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.).
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### **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 Accra for any period of 24 hours or greater
- Parents cannot be reached in the case of an emergency



**Sexual abuse** is 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.

The planning, referred to as 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.

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

#### **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

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

These possible indicators of abuse and neglect (this page and the previous page) will be used by the staff member as a guideline for reporting to the counselor, 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.**

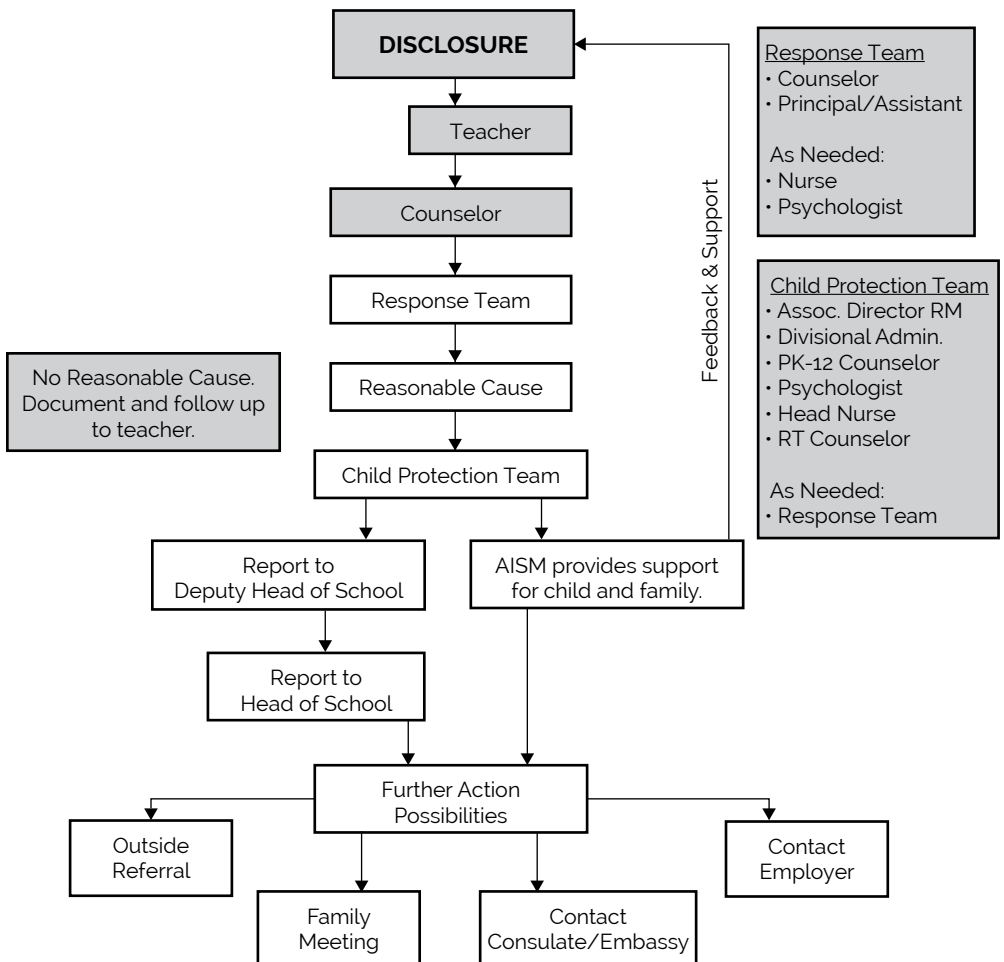


## WHAT HAPPENS AFTER SUSPECTED ABUSE OR NEGLECT IS REPORTED?

**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 counselor, 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 AISM employees are also required to report suspicion of abuse or neglect. All reports of abuse and neglect must be made to the counselor within 48 hours for immediate response.

## STEPS FOLLOWED AFTER DISCLOSURE





# REPORTING PROCEDURES

## Step 1: INFORMATION GATHERING

When a child reports abuse or there is reasonable cause to believe that abuse is occurring, the teacher will seek advice from the grade level counselor within 48 hours. The counselor will notify the school-based response team, and then take initial steps to gather information regarding the reported incident. The response team will include the division administrator, counselor, psychologist, school nurse, and other individuals as the principal 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 with school personnel to review the child's history in the school.
3. A) If warranted, forward report to the Child Protection Team (Move to Step 2)  
B) If report is not substantiated, enter case into Counselor Log (VERIFY) on PowerSchool and report update to the original reporter.

PHOTO



## Step 2: FAMILY CONSULTATION

Based on acquired information, a plan of action will be developed by the Child Protection Team (VERIFY) to assist the child and family. Actions that shall take place are:

- Administrator and counselor (and others as deemed necessary) meet with family, present the School's concerns, review the Child Protection Policy, and establish an action plan.
- On-going observations of the child by the teacher, counselor, or administrator.

### Possible follow-up actions include:

- Referral of the student and family to external professional counseling with Release of Information to counselor
- Contact sponsoring employer regarding concerns
- Consultation with the consulate of the country of the involved family.
- Consultation with the school's legal advisor
- Report to local authorities, as per \_\_\_\_\_ (cite appropriate local law(s))

### **Most cases of suspected abuse or neglect will be handled by school counselors, 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, and suicidal ideation.

### **Cases reported for investigation and outside resources:**

- 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:**

- The consulate of the country of the involved family
- The employer sponsoring the involved family
- Local law enforcement



### **Step 3: FOLLOW UP PROCEDURES**

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.
- Follow up meeting with administrator and counselor to evaluate progress, debriefing on progress.

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

*LIST APPROPRIATE BOARD POLICY ?*

**In the event that the abuse or neglect allegation involves a staff or faculty member of AISM, the administration will follow board policy pursuant to ethical professional behavior.**

***LIST AISM BOARD POLICY NUMBER***

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## **What does a Child Protection Policy mean for the AISM community?**

AISM is defining a standard for the treatment of all children — that they be treated with respect and dignity at all times.

Children have legal and moral rights to their individuality, that when protected, will develop into the ability to meet the needs of the family, community, and global society. Child protection standards defined by AISM encompass all cultures and international law. When given reasonable cause to believe that these rights are violated, AISM will seek all available resources to restore those rights.

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