

# **WESTVIEW CAMBODIAN INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL**

## **CHILD PROTECTION POLICY: SCHOOL YEAR 2023/24**



Westview Cambodian International School places student safety and well-being as its highest priority. As part of this, we are committed to upholding the highest standards in child safeguarding, as clarified in our Child Protection Policy. Safeguarding refers to the actions taken by the school to promote the welfare of children and protect them from all forms of harm including, and not limited to, injury, illness, bullying, exploitation, abuse, and neglect. (Key terms are defined in Appendix 1).

Child abuse is a universal problem with devastating consequences for the children who experience it. It can cause severe and lasting harm, including physical injuries, emotional distress, mental health issues, and difficulties in relationships and trust. In extreme cases, abuse can lead to death. Child abuse can occur in any community, including our own. Therefore, child protection policies are imperative for preventing children from being harmed in the first place, and for giving them the best possible care and protection when maltreatment is discovered.

Our school's governance enforces the Child Protection Policy and appoints members to the Child Protection Committee, which is in place to conduct confidential investigations and to annually review the Child Protection Policy. The Child Protection Committee Includes a "Child Safeguarding Lead" who is a licensed counselor with advanced training in Child Protection. The Child Protection Committee members are listed in Appendix 2.

All faculty and staff are required to report any suspicions or disclosures of improper conduct toward a student no matter when or where the alleged abuse took place. A disclosure is when a student tells someone about their past or ongoing child abuse. All disclosures of child abuse must be reported to the Child Safeguarding Lead, either directly or through the appropriate Child Protection Officer. The Student Affairs Supervisor (SAS) for each grade level serves as that grade level's Child Protection Officer. The reason for this is that students know and trust their SAS and therefore feel comfortable sharing personal information with them.

When a student discloses that he or she has been abused, it is important that the attending adult shows care and concern by responding kindly, listening attentively, and restating what the child has said to ensure the correct interpretation. Our teachers and staff are trained to listen to what the student wants to tell them and to ask open, non-leading questions. They must refrain from conducting any unauthorized investigation and avoid making promises that cannot be kept, such as promising not to tell anyone. Instead, the responding adult must help the child to understand that the School Counselor (Child Safeguarding Lead) needs to be informed and that she is the best person to help. Once the child has been endorsed to the Counselor, the reporting adult needs to complete an incident report within 48 hours.

The initial roles of the School Counselor are: i) to make the child feel safe and ii) to gather relevant information with sensitivity. If there is 'reasonable cause' to believe that the child has been abused or seriously harmed then the School Counselor will take the following five steps:

1. Record the child's own words, keeping them confidential and securely stored
2. Ensure that the child knows his/her rights
3. Explain to the child what will occur next
4. Ensure that the child is kept away from the accused person
5. Ensure that the child receives continuous supervision by a responsible person

'Reasonable cause' refers to just or legitimate grounds for believing that a person has committed or been the victim of wrongdoing. In the case of child abuse, a child's disclosure statement alone may constitute reasonable cause, depending on the gravity of the allegation and the clarity of the child's description. Written statements, medical reports, photographs, witness statements, etc., if properly collected, can add weight to the child's statement. After providing initial care to the child, the School Counselor must meet in person with the Child Protection Officer (SAS) to decide the appropriate next steps, based on the best interests of the child and in accordance with Cambodian law.

The following risk categories are used to make the determination.

**Category A** - Handled by the School Counselor (Safeguarding Lead) and Child Protection Officer

- Student-peer relationships
- Student-parent relationships
- Grieving, sadness, depression
- Low self-esteem
- Victim of bullying
- Perpetrator of bullying
- Witness of bullying
- Substance abuse (minor)

**Category B** - Handled by the Child Protection Committee (and external partner if appropriate)

- Victim of severe neglect or abuse
- Victim of physical assault causing injury
- Post-traumatic stress
- Suicide ideation and/or cutting
- Substance abuse (moderate to severe)
- Psychosis and/or dissociation
- Victim of being threatened with serious violence
- Ideation of committing extreme violence

The School Director must be informed immediately if:

1. The child is at risk of harm
2. The child is showing clear signs of fear, trauma, or distress
3. The disclosure indicates recent or ongoing physical abuse
4. The allegation is grave in nature and/or involves any form of sexual abuse
5. The disclosure implicates a student or staff member

The Child Protection Committee decides the appropriate next steps, based on the best interests of the child and in accordance with Cambodian law. They may assign the school counselor to manage the case and/or they may transfer responsibility to medical and law enforcement experts, when and as appropriate. Depending on the severity of the case, the offending adult may face disciplinary action or termination, with potential involvement of law enforcement authorities.

All students receive child protection education as part of their Health Subject. The child protection curriculum contains age-appropriate personal safety and abuse prevention training for students of all grade levels. Our child protection curriculum goals include the following:

1. Helping students to know their rights
2. Ensuring that students understand and agree to uphold the Student Code of Conduct
3. Building students' self-esteem and to feel comfortable being themselves
4. Helping learners contribute to a trusting and respectful atmosphere
5. Raising awareness about online hazards and ways of keeping safe
6. Understanding that child abuse is never the victim's fault
7. Knowing how to respond assertively to inappropriate behavior
8. Understanding bullying, harassment and the different types of child abuse
9. Seeing the school as part of their support system
10. Learning age-appropriate information about positive relationships
11. Knowing about safe touches and inappropriate touches
12. Knowing the people at home, at school, and in their community who can help

Our teachers and staff must not touch students unless necessary, such as when administering first aid and when assisting or comforting a small child. All forms of physical punishment are strictly prohibited and employees must report any concerns they have about physical discipline to the Child Protection Officer. Additional safeguarding measures include - and are not limited to - the following:

1. Conducting periodic student well-being checks throughout the school year
2. Prohibiting one-on-one interactions between adults and students except in open spaces
3. Requiring teaching assistants to ensure that students are not left unattended
4. Prohibiting cigarette, e-cigarette, drugs and alcohol at school and during school trips / events
5. Only allowing authorized individuals to pick up students after school and from events
6. Ensuring that all students have phone access to a member of staff and their parents during field trips
7. Prohibiting unauthorized electronic communication between students and all staff / volunteers
8. Prohibiting unkind, belittling and shaming language by students and adults
9. Prohibiting staff from using student photographs without special school permission
10. Prohibiting students from entering staff bathrooms and vice versa
11. Not allowing teachers and staff to show favoritism or give gifts to students without school permission
12. Prohibiting all staff from riding in a private vehicle with a student without parental approval and the presence of another accompanying member of staff

## APPENDIX 1: DEFINITIONS

**Bullying** involves deliberate, aggressive acts targeting a particular individual repeatedly over time (or a single severe aggressive act that could inflict lasting trauma). It involves a power difference between the bully and the target: i.e. the bully is bigger and/or stronger and/or more socially powerful and/or more assertive and/or more aggressive than the person being bullied, which makes it difficult or impossible for the victim to defend or protect themselves.

**Emotional Abuse** refers to behavior that degrades or demeans the intrinsic worth of a child as a human being. Emotional abuse may involve verbal assault, excessive teasing, harsh or excessive criticism, social exclusion, name-calling, put-downs, destruction of personal belongings, harmful threats, inappropriate or excessive demands, withholding communication, and public humiliation.

**Exploitation** refers to the use of children for someone else's advantage, gratification or profit often resulting in an unjust, cruel and harmful treatment of the child. These activities disrupt the child's normal physical or mental health, education, moral or social-emotional development. It covers situations of manipulation, misuse, abuse, victimization, oppression, or ill-treatment.

**Neglect** is the failure of a parent or other person with responsibility over a child to provide for basic physical, medical or psychological needs to the degree that the child's health, safety, and wellbeing are threatened. Neglect includes failure to: provide children with adequate food, shelter, or clothing; provide necessary medical or mental healthcare treatment; pay attention to a child's emotional needs; provide adequate supervision; and failing to take action when a student is being bullied or maltreated by another student.

**Physical abuse** is deliberately hurting a child which may or may not cause bruises, broken bones, burns or cuts. Child abuse may result from kicking, shaking, burning, scalding, hitting, punching, biting, shaking, suffocating, or any other violent act against the child.

**Sexual Abuse**, as defined by the World Health Organization, is "the involvement of a child in sexual activity that he or she does not fully comprehend and is unable to give informed consent to, or for which the child is not developmentally prepared, or else that violates the laws or social taboos of society."

## APPENDIX 2: WVIS Child Protection Committee Members (Quorum = 5)

### Core Members (in rank order)

1. School Director
2. Head of Curriculum & Accreditation
3. Head of Student Affairs
4. HR & Admin Manager
5. Assistant School Director
6. School Counselor (Safeguarding Lead)
7. Relevant Child Protection Officer (Grade-level SAS)

### Standby Members

1. Operations Manager - Member
2. Front Office Deputy Manager - Member