



**EFFECTIVE: 29 JULY 2023**

**REVIEWED:**

## **COUNTRY HOUSE SCHOOL CHILD PROTECTION POLICY**

- The welfare of the children is paramount.
- At all times there must be a multi-disciplinary and a multi-agency approach and commitment to the protection, support and safeguarding of children from harm.
- The right to confidentiality for parents, carers, teachers and children must be respected and information will only be shared in the interests of the child's welfare.

We at Country House School have a primary responsibility for the care and safety of the students in our charge and care, and we will carry out this duty through providing a caring, supportive and safe environment, valuing individuals for their unique talents and abilities, and in which our young people can learn and develop to their full potential.

The purpose of this Child Protection Policy is to ensure that everyone who works in the school – teachers, assistants, non-teaching staff, governors and volunteers – has clear guidance on the action required when abuse or neglect of a child is suspected. To this end, the school will ensure that all staff, whether full-time or part-time, permanent or temporary are aware of child protection issues, and their role with regard to these.

### **DEFINITION**

Child abuse means ill-treatment or neglect, which leads to physical, sexual or emotional injury or harm.

### **ABUSERS**

Those people who have been identified as abusers through the legal process suggest strongly that abusers tend to be known to the child (but not exclusively) and have regular access to children. Therefore, children may be abused by a parent, a sibling or other relative, a carer (i.e. a person who has actual custody of a child, such as a foster parent or member of staff in a residential home), people who work in the caring professions, an acquaintance or stranger, who may be an adult or young person. The abuse may be the result of a deliberate act or a failure on the part of the parent or carer to act or to provide care, or both.

### **PHYSICAL**

Actual or deliberate physical injury to a child, or wilful or neglectful failure to prevent physical injury or suffering to a child.

### **INDICATORS**

Multiple bruising and bizarre markings on skin	Burns, scalds or bites
Multiple bruising at different stages of resolution	Untreated injuries
Bruising and lacerations around mouth	Self-destructive behaviour
Finger and thumb marks on body and face	Improbable excuses given to explain injuries
Black eyes, particularly when both are affected	Chronic runaway
Aggressive or withdrawn behaviour	Fear of returning home
Reluctant to have physical contact	Inappropriate clothing, to cover up (hot weather)

## NEGLECT

The actual or likely persistent or significant neglect of a child, or the failure to protect a child from exposure to any kind of danger, including cold or starvation, or persistent failure to carry out important aspects of care, resulting in the significant impairment of the child's health or development, including non-organic failure to thrive.

### INDICATORS

Constant hunger	Lack of attention and restlessness
Poor state of clothing and hygiene	Lack of social relationships
Untreated medical problems	Compulsive stealing, begging and scavenging
Constant tiredness	Frequently absent or late
Abnormally thin or weak, distended stomach	Low self-esteem

## SEXUAL ABUSE

Actual or likely exploitation of a child. The involvement of children and adolescents in sexual activities they do not truly comprehend, to which they are unable to give informed consent or that violate the social taboos of family roles.

### INDICATORS

Soreness, bleeding in genital areas, sore throat	Chronically depressed and suicidal, outbursts/anger
Torn, stained or bleeding underclothes	STD diseases
Chronic ailments, headaches and stomach cramps	Inappropriately seductive and precocious
Difficulty walking and sitting	Sexual explicit language
Frequent yeast and urinary infections	Low self-esteem, confidence
Nightmares and fear of dark	Protective of siblings

## EMOTIONAL ABUSE

Actual or likely persistent or significant emotional ill-treatment or rejection, resulting in severe adverse effects on the emotional, physical, and/or behavioural development of a child. All abuse involves some emotional ill-treatment.

### INDICATORS

Sudden speech disorder	Attention seeking behaviour
Self-mutilation	Poor peer relationships
Solvent abuse (mouth sores, glue smell, drowsiness)	Neurotic behaviour (rocking, thumb sucking)
Wetting or soiling	Reluctant for parent liaison
Chronic runaway	Inappropriate response to painful situations

## IDENTIFICATION OF ABUSE

Because of our day-to-day contact with individual children, we as teachers – but also non-teaching staff, including lunch-time supervisors and ancillary staff – are particularly well placed to observe outward symptoms or changes in appearance, behaviour, learning pattern or development. Such symptoms may be due to a variety of other causes, including bereavement or other disruption in family circumstances. Sometimes, however, they may be due to child abuse.

## SIGNS OF ABUSE

The signs of abuse (not an exhaustive list) such as those described above can do no more than give rise to concern – they are not in themselves proof that abuse has occurred. But teachers and other school staff should be aware of the possible implications of, and be alert to, all such signs, particularly if they appear in combination or are regularly repeated. A child may make a comment which would indicate a child protection concern. A child may make a disclosure of abuse. Where a member of staff is concerned that abuse may have occurred, he or she must report this immediately.

## **CONFIDENTIALITY**

- No promise of secrecy can or should ever be given where abuse is alleged.
- Staff have a professional responsibility to share relevant information about the protection of children with other professionals, particularly investigative agencies.
- Sensitive information about children and parents is confidential and should not be made the subject of general conversation outside the school, other than with statutory officials.
- All staff should recognise, therefore, that in order to protect children from harm, confidentiality must be subordinated to the need to take appropriate action, by involving others in the child's best interest.

## **DEALING WITH DISCLOSURES OF ABUSE – THE 5 R'S**

A child may quite innocently disclose details of abuse that occurs within the family or other situations. It is also the case that children with experience of abuse may unburden themselves to a member of staff as the one adult they can trust. It is vital that the member of staff in whom a child has chosen to confide is sympathetic and supportive. The member of staff should remain calm and reassuring. Children who have suffered abuse may have low self-esteem or may withdraw if they detect signs of doubt or revulsion.

### **1. RECEIVE**

Listen to the child, and do not interrupt if he or she is freely recalling significant events. Never attempt to cross-examine the child or press for information.

### **2. REASSURE**

Reassure the child that they have done the right thing by talking to you.

Do not promise to keep secret what the child has said. Explain that you may need to speak with one of the members of the Health & Safety team who will know what to do next and how to help them.

### **3. RESPOND**

Care must be taken in asking questions and interpreting children's responses.

Do not ask questions which encourage the child to change his or her version of events in any way, or which impose the adult's own assumptions. For example, staff should say, "Tell me what happened", rather than, "Did they do X to you?" (a leading question).

### **4. RECORD**

A report of the discussion should be made immediately after it has taken place which should record:

- The information revealed by the child, quoting his or her words, where possible.
- The date, time, place, to whom the suspicions were reported and any other persons present.
- Any signs of physical injury observed should be described in detail, or sketched in a diagram, but under no circumstances should a child's clothing be removed.
- Date, sign and time the record.

### **5. REPORT**

Immediately pass a copy to the designated member of the Health and safety Committee, which will further investigate and report to the Heads and Principal of the School.

No attempt should be made to discuss concerns or fears with the parents or indeed with anyone who is not involved with the care of the child. If the child's allegations prove to be untrue, reporting them to someone who is not concerned with the care of the child may be deemed to be defamatory.

Staff should also be aware that their report of the discussion may need to be used in any court proceedings.

- The local welfare organisation;
- The school Health & Safety Committee;
- The Child Protection Unit;
- The SAPS in the residential area of the complainant;
- Labour Relations, when employees are the alleged offenders;
- The complainant's parent(s) (with the consent of the complainant, if she or he is over 14), provided that they are not the alleged offenders;
- The Child protection Centre;
- The Department of Health and the Department of Social Services;
- WCED's Safe Schools Call Centre at 0800-45-46-47.

## **DEALING WITH ALLEGED OFFENDERS**

The following guidelines refer to situations where the alleged offender is another learner, a teacher or school employee, or a school principal.

### **A STUDENT IS THE ALLEGED OFFENDER:**

Attempt to prevent the alleged offender from committing further abuse. Implement the following additional procedure if necessary:

Contact the alleged offender's parents, inform them of the incidents and discuss a plan of action for support and intervention.

Refer the alleged offender for emotional support and therapy if necessary.

The alleged offender should be dealt with through the school's disciplinary procedure. (If the offence was serious enough to merit suspension or expulsion the school principal will refer the matter to the governing body of the school.)

### **A TEACHER OR SCHOOL EMPLOYEE IS THE ALLEGED OFFENDER:**

The parent, teacher or employee to whom the disclosure was made should inform the school Heads or Principal, in turn inform the department's Labour Relations personnel.

### **THE SCHOOL PRINCIPAL OR ONE OF THE HEADS ARE THE ALLEGED OFFENDER:**

The employee to whom the disclosure was made should inform the department's Labour Relations personnel. The employee to whom the disclosure was made should also forward all relevant documents.

## **CODE OF CONDUCT @COUNTRY HOUSE SCHOOL**

Staff must always be mindful of the fact that they hold a position of trust, and their behaviour towards children in their charge must be above reproach. The Code of Conduct is not intended to discourage positive interaction between staff and pupils but to assist staff in respect of the complex issue of Child Abuse, by drawing attention to the areas of risk for staff and by offering guidance on appropriate conduct.

### **PRIVATE MEETINGS WITH PUPILS**

When confidential interviews are taking place, staff should:

Conduct such interviews in a room with a visual panel, or with the door open, and not use a sign prohibiting entry to an interview room

Where possible have another pupil, or preferably another adult, nearby during the interview.

### **PHYSICAL CONTACT WITH PUPILS**

It is important that everyone is aware of the risks they face if they use corporal punishment to discipline pupils, or if they touch children other than to comfort the youngest of them or to deal with injuries or accidents.

As a general principle staff are advised not to make unnecessary physical contact with pupils. This is particularly the case with older primary school children, especially in Primary Grades 4 and up.

Physical contact will be necessary for the staff in the Pre-School division, if a child has an accident while, for example in the playground or at the toilet. Only permanent members of staff may change a child's clothing. In order not to place the staff in a suspect position with regard to changing children, they should:

- Tell another member of staff that they are changing the child.
- Change the child in a reasonably open space, if possible where the other member of staff can see them.
- Be gentle with the child, especially if the child needs cleaned following a toileting accident.
- Try not to make the child feel bad about what is happening.
- Respect the child's dignity at all times.

## **PRINCIPLES FOR STAFF CONDUCT**

Physical contact, which may be misunderstood by the pupils, parents or other casual observers should be avoided. Putting a hand on the shoulder or arm, which is repeated with an individual pupil, should be avoided. Other more obvious and more intimate contact should never occur.

There may be occasions when a distressed child needs comfort and reassurance, which may include physical comforting, such as a caring parent would give. Staff should use their discretion in such cases.

Following any incident where a member of staff feels that their actions may be misunderstood by a pupil, a written report of the incident should be submitted immediately to the Heads.

This would apply especially in a case where a child had to be restrained physically to prevent him/her from inflicting injury on others or themselves, from damaging property or committing a criminal offence.

- Where possible, staff should avoid one-to-one contact with children in the following areas: toilets, classrooms, cars or after school.
- Staff should never invite pupils to their homes.
- Staff must not under any circumstances use corporal punishment, such as hitting. If there is a problem of serious misbehaviour and the member of staff cannot deal with the situation they should bring the pupil(s) to the Principal / Assistant Principal.
- If, in an emergency, staff have to administer first aid, they should ensure where possible that other children or another adult are present, if staff have any doubts as to whether necessary physical contact in the circumstances could be misunderstood.
- No member of staff should hesitate to provide first aid in an emergency because another person is not present.
- Staff must never make sexually suggestive comments to or about a child, even in jest.
- Staff must never keep suspicions of abuse or inappropriate behaviour by a colleague to themselves. If there is an attempted cover-up, staff should be aware that they could be implicated.
- Any report of alleged bullying of a pupil must be passed to the Heads.

## **CHOICE AND USE OF TEACHING MATERIALS**

Staff must take due care when using teaching materials of a sensitive nature, especially sex education programmes.

If members of staff are in doubt, they should consult the Principal / Assistant Principal.

Staff should not use unsuitable video/DVD films/programmes. Certificate 'PG' do not necessarily mean they are suitable.

## **RELATIONSHIPS AND ATTITUDES**

Staff should ensure that their relationships with the pupils are appropriate to the age, maturity and sex of the pupils.

From time to time, it is prudent for all staff to re-appraise their teaching style, relationships with children, and their manner and approach to individual children to ensure that they give no grounds for doubt about their intentions in the minds of colleagues, of pupils or of the parents/guardians.

## **CONCLUSION**

While it may be necessary to share concerns and complaints, we at Country House School will proceed in a confidential manner and only those who need to know will be informed.

Do not hesitate to contact us if you have a concern or complaint.

We all have a duty of care to protect children, and their welfare must always be our priority.

## SECTION 2

### MISSING CHILD POLICY

Country House School takes the welfare of children very seriously and every precaution is taken to ensure the safety of the children in its care. School routines and procedures are in place to contribute to the prevention of a child going missing and to ensuring the safety and security of all children at all times. In the unlikely event that a child is found to be missing, the school puts into practice agreed procedures.

#### PROCEDURE IF A CHILD LEAVES THE SETTING UNACCOMPANIED:

1. All available staff to check toilets, shared areas, rooms, playground and outside areas to ensure that the child is not hiding or locked in anywhere.
2. One member of staff to immediately inform school office and Head Teacher or Deputy Head in her absence) and check whether the child has been signed out for an external appointment or has an internal appointment with a visiting professional (Speech Therapist etc).
3. One member of staff to gather the class and call register to confirm that the child is missing.
4. Staff will ensure that all other pupils are kept safe and closely supervised throughout the incident.
5. If after ten minutes the child is not found, **THEN;**
  1. School office staff will contact the parents/carers with parental responsibility and the Head Teacher/Deputy Head Teacher will contact the police. At this point the school will support the police who will now lead the response to this incident.
  2. The Head Teacher (or Deputy Head Teacher in her absence) should communicate the incident to the Local Authority Office.
  3. A written record of the incident and any action taken should be made as soon after the incident as is practicable and placed on the pupil's confidential record.
  4. The Health, Safety & Crisis Team should conduct an internal investigation to establish how the situation occurred, how effective was the response and to ascertain whether action needs to be taken to try to ensure that it does not happen again.

#### PROCEDURE IF A CHILD IS FOUND TO BE MISSING ON AN OFF-SITE VISIT

- Risk assessments must be completed prior to approval of any outing
  - A register of attendees must be carried by staff supervising the visit.
  - Regular head counts will be undertaken by staff during the visit.
1. If a child is missing, the other children will be gathered together and a member of staff assigned to look for the child. An urgent and thorough search should be made of the immediate vicinity.
  2. Staff managing the off-site location should be informed and their help sought.
  3. If the child is not found immediately, the police must be called to the location. At this point the school will support the police who will now lead the response to the incident.
  4. The office and Heads must be informed immediately so that parents/carers can be contacted.
  5. It is the duty of the staff supervising the visit to keep the School apprised of the situation.
  6. A written record of the incident and any action taken should be made as soon after the incident as is practicable and placed on the pupil's confidential record.
  7. The Health, Safety & Crisis Team should conduct an internal investigation to establish how the situation occurred, how effective was the response and to ascertain whether action needs to be taken to try to ensure that it does not happen again.

#### SIGNATURE APPROVAL

BEHALF OF HEADS		DATE	
BEHALF OF SGB		DATE	
PRINCIPAL		DATE	