



MIS Safeguarding and Child Protection Handbook

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Introduction

The Scale of the Problem

Child abuse and neglect – particularly sexual abuse – are among the world's most serious concerns, with millions of cases reported to various children's protective service organizations each year. It is estimated globally that 150 million girls and 73 million boys under the age of 18 have experienced forced sexual intercourse or other forms of sexual violence involving physical contact (International Center for Assault Prevention: www.internationalcap.org/abuse_statistics.html). Yet, it is also estimated that much abuse is underreported either because the victims are afraid to tell anyone what has happened, or the adults who observe or suspect the abuse are unsure of what to do.

A 2011 research summary entitled *Child Maltreatment* conducted by the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services reported:

- 3.4M referrals, involving the alleged maltreatment of 6.2M children
- Over 3M children received services from child protection agencies
- 681,000 were victims of one or more instance of child abuse or neglect
- The largest percentage of reports are filed by teachers, law enforcement, social services

Of the substantiated cases:

- 78.5% suffered from neglect/emotional abuse
- 17.6% suffered physical abuse
- 9.1% suffered from sexual abuse
- 1,570 children died from abuse and neglect
- 86% of all perpetrators were related to the children
- 81% were committed by parents

Definitions

Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children is defined as:

- protecting children from maltreatment
- preventing impairment of children's health or development
- ensuring children are growing up in circumstances consistent with the provision of safe and effective care.

Child protection is a part of safeguarding and promoting welfare. It refers to the activity that is undertaken to protect specific children who are suffering, or are likely to suffer, significant harm. Effective child protection is essential as part of wider work to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. However, all agencies and individuals should aim to proactively safeguard and promote the welfare of children so that the need for action to protect children from harm is reduced.

International schools have a moral as well as legal duty to safeguard the welfare of our students, as well as those children using our facilities or involved with our programs and activities. The MIS Safeguarding and Child Protection Handbook sets forth the steps our faculty, staff, students, volunteers, contractors, and consultants are required to take to minimize the threat of child abuse in our schools and to respond promptly and effectively should abuse be observed, suspected, or disclosed.

The Handbook addresses the following essential components of a comprehensive Safeguarding and Child Protection Program:

1. Recognizing, responding to, and reporting allegations and suspicions of child abuse and neglect.
2. Screening and selecting staff, faculty, and volunteers.

3. Training and education about child sexual abuse prevention.
4. A Code of Conduct that guides interactions between adults and children.
5. Ensuring safe environments and practices.
6. Connecting to local authority and resources.

Our goal is to build and maintain a proactive environment that protects children by either preventing child abuse before it occurs or by ensuring its earliest possible detection, intervention and reporting. Our strategy is to ensure that all MIS school personnel, from professional faculty and staff, employees and contractual personnel, to student teachers, interns, volunteers, classroom assistants, students and parents understand the issues of child abuse and neglect; know how to recognize its signs and symptoms; are familiar with reporting procedures; and know the responsibilities of mandated reporters, including how, when, and to whom to make a report. Ultimately, MIS should strive to have policies, procedures, and training in place so that if child abuse is suspected, observed, or disclosed to any member of the MIS community, that person will have the knowledge, information, and resources necessary to ensure that the child is safe, that the situation is communicated promptly and effectively, and that the suspicion or incident is reported to the appropriate authorities.

The Handbook is divided into sections that provide the context and rationale for the creation of a safeguarding and child protection framework, guidance for the development of policies and procedures; suggestions for an annual calendar of activities; links to curriculum resources; and suggestions for connecting to local, national, and international resources dedicated to the legal, investigative, social service and advocacy needs of abused and neglected children and their families. Multiple appendices provide a code of conduct; a step-by-step process outlining how MIS can review its child protection programs; protocols for handling disclosures; and methods of monitoring the School child protection program.

The purpose of this Handbook is to provide impetus and support for MIS to embrace Safeguarding and Child Protection as an essential responsibility of the school in their community and to embrace the school's role and responsibility to ensure systems and programs are in place to support children and families in need.

OBJECTIVES OF THIS DOCUMENT

Assist MIS in creating a Safeguarding and Child Protection Program that is appropriate and applicable to its local setting;

Provide all of the necessary definitions and assessment tools for clear identification and recognition of abuse/neglect situations;

Ensure a high standard of safeguarding and child protection in the School;

Ensure that prompt and adequate assistance is provided to a child in need of special care and protection;

Define procedures for staff members and establish clear reporting guidelines and mechanisms;

Outline processes and protocols for MIS in connecting to its local community, and to agencies for child protection support; and

Provide sample personal safety/abuse prevention lessons, curriculum modules, and resources to educate both adults and children about the dangers of child maltreatment, its recognition, and its prevention.

COMMONLY HELD MYTHS VS THE REALITIES ABOUT CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT

Myth: *Child abuse is carried out by strangers.* **Fact:** Research indicates that 90% of abuse is from domestic causes and is committed by individuals known to the child. International school communities tend to have families that move often and are separated from their extended families in their home-of-record. When abuse is within the family, the transient life-style then increases the risk to international school students who tend not to have access to outside resources, and therefore cannot get help.

Myth: *Learning about child protection is harmful to children.* **Fact:** Research indicates that developmentally appropriate education makes children more confident and able to react to dangerous situations. Teaching using a specific population context increases protective behavior.

Myth: *Abuse education is sex education.* **Fact:** Research-based programs prepare students to develop the skills and attitudes to keep themselves safe from perpetrators, and behaviors that include bullying, harassment and other forms of exploitation.

Myth: *Abuse is a matter of culture; physical or sexual abuse falls within the norms of some cultures and is acceptable.* **Fact:** The reality is that there no excuse for child abuse! No culture supports harming children.

Myth: *Child abuse is a result of poverty and happens in low socioeconomic circumstances.* **Fact:** Research indicates that child abuse occurs in all racial, ethnic, socio-economic, and cultural sectors of society. A common characteristic of an abusive family is isolation, such as that commonly found in our international school families who move often or are separated from their extended families at home.

Myth: *International Schools do not have to report abuse to local authorities.* **Fact:** International schools are bound by the laws of the host country and as such international schools must be knowledgeable and compliant with the child protection laws in their locale. Furthermore, international schools are legally and ethically liable for any violation of existing laws related to reporting of cases of abuse or neglect; there are cases now pending where schools are facing legal action in regard to non-compliance.

International School Communities

1. Characteristics/attributes of international school children

- Transience and mobility impacts development of identity and relationships (especially for support in times of need);
- Early maturity/sophistication vs. naiveté and immaturity in other areas;
- Separation from extended families; working and traveling parents, and separation from long term friendships/relationships results in attachment issues and thus support during times of crisis or need may be minimal or non-existent;
- Lost between multiple and sometimes conflicting cultures and value systems resulting in confusion of behavioral expectations;
- High expectations placed on students to achieve academically;
- Access to maids and other daily helpers (drivers); and
- Access to expensive international schools because companies pay tuition while *they* (and their peers) in their home-of-record, previously attended public school

2. Characteristics of international school families

- Isolation from extended family, previous community for support;

- Power differential in marriage (who has the work permit) creates vulnerability;
- Impact of absentee parents;
- “Love – hate” relationship with host country for expatriates;
- Lack of control over critical life decisions: company decides where, when, and how the family moves. Lack of stability; and
- Superficial/tourist relationship with host country.

3. Characteristics of international school communities

- School takes on sole role as center of family life - “goldfish bowl” - and often provides superficial relationships that cannot meet mental health needs;
- Power influence: family's “position” in community can be an inhibitor for school to act; and • Sense of being “lost” in diversity of community – can cause further isolation.

4. Cultural dynamics of international school communities

- Multiple norms rooted in different cultural traditions can cause confusion: religious values, values of parenting, discipline, care-giving, sexuality, gender roles and responsibilities;
- Impact of rapidly changing “pop culture” from developed nations;
- Varying degrees of openness rooted in cultural traditions; and
- Varying cultural attitudes toward gender issues and child development – different concepts of developmental needs through childhood.

International school communities are vulnerable to abuse because the nature of abuse requires, secrecy, insularity, isolation and limited access to support resources, which are some characteristics of the international community. International schools must respond to the reality that these characteristics are exactly the characteristics that perpetrators will use to their advantage in abusing children.

The characteristics of abusers

While most abusers are known to the child there are predators who will stop at nothing to access their victims. They will seek weak jurisdictions where children are less protected. They will move from country to country to avoid detection. They don't look like monsters or weirdoes, indeed they are often superficially attractive to the youngsters. They win their trust by appearing caring. They are skilled liars who will deceive their colleagues. An international school in Myanmar, at this stage of the country's development, is very vulnerable as it is an attractive environment for abusers.

WHAT IS ABUSE?

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.**”

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 an institutional (e.g. school) or community setting; children may be abused by individuals known to them, or more rarely, by a stranger. Often children may experience multiple forms of abuse simultaneously, further complicating the problem.

Most child abuse is inflicted by someone the child knows, respects or trusts. International school communities have unique characteristics of which school personnel must be aware in terms of the individuals who are around our children. School personnel should be knowledgeable of the potential reasons why children may not be able to talk about any victimization they might have experienced.

To increase the MIS community's awareness, this Handbook focuses on four main categories of abuse and provides basic information about the physical and behavioral signs associated with each type.

Physical abuse may involve hitting, punching, shaking, throwing, poisoning, biting, burning or scalding, drowning, suffocating or otherwise causing intentional physical harm to a child.

Signs of physical abuse

- Bruises, burns, sprains, dislocations, bites, cuts
- 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
- Self harm
- Suicide ideation

Emotional abuse is the persistent emotional ill treatment of a child so as to cause severe and adverse effects on a child’s emotional development. It may involve: conveying to children that they are worthless or unloved; that they are inadequate or valued only insofar as they meet the needs of another person; age or developmentally inappropriate expectations being imposed on children; causing children frequently to feel frightened; or the exploitation or corruption of children. Some level of emotional abuse is involved in all types of ill-treatment of a child, though it may also occur alone.

Signs of emotional abuse

- Physical, mental and emotional development is delayed
- Highly anxious
- Showing delayed speech or sudden speech disorder
- Fear of new situations
- Low self-esteem
- Inappropriate emotional responses to painful situations
- Extremes of passivity or aggression
- Drug or alcohol abuse
- Chronic running away
- Compulsive stealing

- Obsessions or phobias
- Sudden under-achievement or lack of concentration
- Attention-seeking behavior
- Persistent tiredness
- Lying
- Self harm
- Suicide ideation

Sexual abuse involves forcing or enticing a child to take part in sexual activities, whether or not the child is aware of what is happening. The activities may involve physical contact, including penetrative (i.e. rape) or non-penetrative acts. They may include non-contact activities, such as involving children in the production or viewing of pornographic material or encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways. Children involved in commercial sex work are victims of sexual abuse, whether they perceive themselves as victims or not.

Signs of sexual abuse

- Pain or irritation to the genital area
- Vaginal or penile discharge
- Difficulty with urination
- Infection, bleeding
- STDs
- Fear of people or places
- Aggression
- Regressive behaviors, bed wetting or stranger anxiety
- Excessive masturbation
- Sexually provocative
- Stomach pains or discomfort walking or sitting
- Being unusually quiet and withdrawn or unusually aggressive
- Suffering from what seem physical ailments that can't be explained medically
- Showing fear or distrust of a particular adult
- Mentioning receiving special attention from an adult or a new "secret" friendship with an adult or young person
- Refusal to continue with school or usual social activities
- Age inappropriate sexualized behavior or language
- Self harm
- Suicide ideation

Neglect is the persistent failure 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 needs unattended
- Lack of supervision
- Consistent hunger
- Inappropriate dress
- Poor hygiene
- Inadequate nutrition
- Fatigue or listlessness
- Self-destructive
- Extreme loneliness
- Extreme need for affection
- Failure to grow
- Poor personal hygiene
- Frequent lateness or non-attendance at school
- Low self-esteem
- Poor social relationships
- Compulsive stealing
- Drug or alcohol abuse

- Self harm
- Suicide ideation

Long term impact of unmitigated child abuse

The impact of child abuse can persist for a lifetime after the abuse has been committed. Some victims of abuse are resilient and thus manage to function and survive. Much research has established the relationship between long-term child abuse and life-time health and well-being, especially if the children do not get appropriate support to help them cope with the trauma.

The most important point to consider is that children often are exposed to multiple forms of abuse and suffer a myriad of symptoms. Furthermore, all forms of abuse have the potential for long-term impact on the victims, and can affect the victim's ability to function as a human being. Abuse challenges the self-value, self-esteem, and sense of worth of its victims, rendering them hopeless, helpless and unable to live a complete life.

Long term impact of child abuse

- Poor educational achievement
- Inability to complete responsibilities
- Inability to live according to plan/ability
- Inability to care for self
- Inability to coexist, cooperate or work with others
- Lack of self-confidence, prone to addiction
- Inability to express love / or accept love
- Inability to lead family, constant health problem
- Prone to mental health problems
- Low self-esteem, depression and anxiety
- Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)
- Attachment difficulties
- Eating disorders
- Poor peer relations, self-injurious behavior (e.g., suicide attempts)

Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy Statement

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. Myanmar International School endorses the *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child*, of which Myanmar is a signatory.

Schools fill a special institutional role in society as protectors of children. Schools need to insure 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 insure 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 MIS 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 in Myanmar to the appropriate child protection agency in the home country, and/or to local authorities.

MIS seeks to be a safe haven for students who may be experiencing abuse or neglect in any aspect of their lives. As such, we 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 insure the safety of children, and will review the policy annually for compliance and effectiveness.

In the case of a staff member reported as an alleged offender, MIS 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



Safeguarding and Child Protection Team

The Safeguarding and Child Protection Team includes the Principals, Senior Leader Student Support (Chair), Counsellors and the School Doctor.

Background checks

Before appointment all staff must provide a criminal background check from their home country, their current place of residence and, where possible, all places they have lived since age 18.

If the check shows any of the following issues it would automatically invalidate any offer of employment, as would failing to agree to the check. Other offences might also lead to offers being withdrawn.

Automatic Disqualification

- Past history of sexual victimization of children (regardless of whether the individual completed therapy)
- Conviction for any crime in which children were involved (regardless of successful completion of probation or incarceration)
- History of violence or any sexually exploitative behaviour, including acts against adults
- Automatic disqualification also results if we discover termination from a paid or volunteer position for misconduct with a child, deceit about criminal history or deceit about qualifications.

All staff must provide updated checks every three years.

Single Central Record of Staff

The HR department will maintain a single central record of all staff including copies of their:

- CV
- Passport
- Background check
- Qualifications
- References

The original documents must be provided and copies signed to say that the originals have been seen.

Staff Code of Conduct

All staff must sign and follow this Code

Statement of Acknowledgement of Code of Conduct for Signature

I agree that I will follow this Code of Conduct as a condition of my working with children and young people at Myanmar International School.

I will:

- Treat everyone with respect, patience, integrity, courtesy, dignity, and consideration.
- Recognise, praise and celebrate students' efforts, achievements and improvements.
- Maintain appropriate physical boundaries at all times and touch children – when necessary – only in ways that are in line with guidance issued.
- Report to my Principal any gifts made by parents, or by students with their parents' consent, to a member of staff with a value that could be more than 10USD.
- Avoid being alone with a child and/or young person where possible, and ensure any 1:1 interactions are captured on CCTV. 1:1 meetings outside school are prohibited. (The Academic Leadership Team, Counsellors and Doctor are exempt from this restriction for interviews that are required by the nature of their duties.)
- Report all allegations and disclosures of abuse from any source immediately to the Counsellor or, if the alleged perpetrator is a member of staff, to the Academic Director. If the allegation is against the Academic Director, report to the School Coordinator.
- Report any conversations or actions witnessed that arouse any suspicion that a member of staff might be abusing children or young people to the Academic Director or School Coordinator.
- Cooperate fully in any investigation of abuse of children and/or young people.

I will not:

- Touch or speak to a child and/or young people in a sexual or other inappropriate manner.
- Inflict any sexual, physical or emotional abuse such as striking, shaking, slapping, humiliating, ridiculing, threatening, or degrading children and/or young people.
- Use insults or comparisons with others when working with children and/or young people.
- Smoke or use tobacco products, or possess, or be under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs at any time while working with children and/or young people.
- Give a child who is not my own a ride home.
- Accept gifts from or give gifts to children or young people without the knowledge of the parents or guardians other than small gifts of flowers or food given to colleagues by children as part of celebrations or for the member of staff's birthday.
- Engage in private communications with children via text messaging, email, Facebook, Twitter or similar forms electronic or social media other than approved and monitored school systems.
- Use profanity in the presence of children and/or young people at any time.

I understand that as a person working with and/or providing services to children and young people under the auspices of Myanmar International School, I am subject to background checks. My signature confirms that I have read this Code of Conduct and that as a person working with children and young people I agree to follow these standards. I understand that any action inconsistent with this Code of Conduct or failure to take action mandated by this Code of Conduct may result in disciplinary action up to and including dismissal from Myanmar International School.

Name:

Signature/Date:

Safeguarding

1. Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy is distributed annually to parents and staff
2. School provides parents, staff and students with a common definition of child abuse (physical, sexual, emotional and neglect)
3. Curriculum written and taught to students annually that includes strategies to recognize inappropriate behaviors, respond assertively and to report incidents to school personnel and/or family members
4. Staff Code of Conduct to give clear expectations and boundaries
5. Behaviour and Anti-Bullying policies are publicized and implemented
6. School leadership designs and implements procedures to ensure the safe recruitment and selection of staff

Disclosures and allegations

Prepare for disclosures

Teaching students about child protection and making yourself a part of their support system invites them to come to you with a problem. School personnel must understand and know how to respond appropriately, knowing that it is often very difficult for children to disclose abuse. Students often cannot tell about a touching problem because of the fear of:

Memory. Children often cope with their abuse by pushing it so far back in their minds that they “forget.” To remember means to feel hurt again.

Loss of Love. Children often worry that their parents or friends won’t love them once they know about their abuse because now they are “dirty.” This is often because children will take responsibility for their abuse. Children also often fear the separation of their family because of the telling. Offenders work hard to reinforce these feelings in order to keep the child silent.

Shame & Guilt. Children either know or can sense that what happened, especially a sexual experiences with an adult are wrong. By telling someone and acknowledging that this happened, they fear the shame of the abuse. They fear they will get into trouble for telling. Older children will experience more of a sense of guilt than younger children, especially in sexual abuse.

Blame. Children fear that they will be blamed for what happened and in the case of sexual abuse that they somehow wanted it. Adults tend to be believed over the child and offenders often state that the child “asked” for the sexual touch or other abuse.

Harm. Offenders often maintain control over their victims by threatening harm to them or their families if they tell. Children are then burdened with the inappropriate responsibility for keeping their families safe.

Understanding these fears of disclosure will help in your appropriate response.

Guidelines for Responding to a Child's Disclosure

- Do not let a child swear you to secrecy before telling you something. You may need to report, which the child will view as breaking your trust with them.
- If a child asks to speak with you, try to find a neutral setting where you can have quiet and few interruptions.
- Do not lead the child in telling. Just listen, letting him/her explain in his/her own words. Don't pressure for a great amount of detail.
- Respond calmly and matter-of-factly. Even if the story that the child tells you is difficult to hear, it is important not to register disgust or alarm.
- Do not make judgmental or disparaging comments about the abuser - it is often someone the child loves or with whom he/she is close.
- Do not make promises to the child that things will get better.
- Do not confront the abuser.
- If the child does not want to go home, this should be considered an emergency. Report and handle immediately by contacting your Principal
. Do not take the child home with you!
- Respect the child's confidence. Share with the Child Protection Team, but limit information from and with other staff.
- Explain to the child that you must tell someone else to get help.
- Try to let the child know that someone else also will need to talk with him/her and explain why
- Empower the student by as much as possible allowing the child a part in the process.



PLEASE NOTE: TEACHERS ARE NOT INVESTIGATORS. YOUR ROLE IS TO LISTEN AND RESPOND TO DISCLOSURES IN ORDER TO DETERMINE THE NEXT STEP FOR STUDENTS TO GET THE HELP THEY NEED. WHEN APPROPRIATE, A REQUEST FOR AN INVESTIGATION MUST BE MADE. MAKE A WRITTEN RECORD USING THE CHILD'S WORDS SO FAR AS POSSIBLE AS SOON AS YOU CAN.

It is obligatory for faculty, staff, and administrators to report incidents, allegations, suspicions and disclosures of abuse immediately or within 24 hours, to a school counselor or principal who shall inform the academic director. As soon as possible, the reporting member of staff should write a report, using the child's own words wherever possible when a disclosure has been made.

Failure to report a suspicion, allegation or disclosure is in itself a disciplinary offence that could amount to gross misconduct.

If there is reasonable cause to believe child abuse has occurred, the School shall follow the steps noted in these guidelines, documenting all aspects of the investigation and resulting actions. Such actions include, but are not limited to, one or more of the following:

- Conference with students involved
- Parent notification
- Meeting with parents
- Meeting with others pertinent to the case, including the alleged perpetrator(s)
- Contacting school nurse
- Psychological assessment
- Mandatory counseling sessions
- Referral to the Child Protection Team
- Reporting to a partner NGO
- Legal action and prosecution by the authorities
- Suspension or termination of employment (if a school employee)

EDUCATION AND TRAINING

All staff will receive introductory training annually as part of induction.

The Child Protection Team will receive further training to support them in their roles.

