

WESTFIELDS INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL
POSITIVE BEHAVIOURAL INTERVENTIONS & SUPPORTS (PBIS)

SAFEGUARDING & CHILD PROTECTION:
Child Safeguarding Policy for Westfields International School

INTRODUCTION:

This Child Safeguarding Policy is designed to ensure the safety, protection, and well-being of children within the school environment in accordance with relevant Philippine laws and regulations. The policy outlines the school's commitment to preventing child abuse, promoting child protection, and addressing any concerns or incidents appropriately. It is the responsibility of all staff, volunteers, and stakeholders to adhere to this policy in order to create a safe and nurturing learning environment for children.

LEGAL FRAMEWORK:

The Child Safeguarding Policy is guided by the following relevant Philippine laws and regulations:

- a. **Republic Act No. 7610** (Special Protection of Children Against Abuse, Exploitation, and Discrimination Act) - This law provides protection to children against all forms of abuse, exploitation, and discrimination, and establishes a comprehensive system for child protection.
- b. **Republic Act No. 9262** (Anti-Violence Against Women and Their Children Act) - This law protects women and children from violence, abuse, and exploitation, and promotes their welfare and well-being.
- c. **Republic Act No. 7877** (Anti-Sexual Harassment Act) - This law prohibits sexual harassment in educational institutions and other related environments.
- d. **Republic Act No. 11313** (Safe Spaces Act) - This law aims to prevent, prohibit, and penalize gender-based sexual harassment in public spaces, including schools, and provides mechanisms for reporting, investigation, and support for victims.

CHILD PROTECTION MEASURES:

a. Recruitment and Screening:

The school will conduct thorough background checks, including reference checks, police clearances, and verification of qualifications, for all staff and volunteers. Appropriate interview processes will be followed to assess the suitability of candidates for working with children.

b. Code of Conduct:

The school has a comprehensive code of conduct which has been communicated to all staff, volunteers, and stakeholders. It outlines expected behaviors, including maintaining appropriate boundaries with children, avoiding abusive or exploitative conduct, and treating all children with respect and dignity. Clear guidelines

regarding appropriate physical contact with children are established and communicated.

c. Reporting Mechanisms:

Clear procedures for reporting child protection concerns or incidents are established (see *section Reporting and Investigation*), ensuring that all staff and stakeholders are aware of their responsibility to report any suspected or actual cases of abuse, neglect, or exploitation. Reporting channels include designated child protection officers, school administrators, and other appropriate individuals. Whistleblower protection measures will be in place to safeguard individuals reporting concerns in good faith.

d. Training and Awareness:

Regular training and awareness programs are conducted for all staff and volunteers to ensure they understand their roles and responsibilities in safeguarding children. Training covers topics such as child protection policies, recognizing signs of abuse, responding to disclosures, and appropriate behavior when interacting with children. Training will be tailored to specific roles and responsibilities within the school.

e. Confidentiality and Privacy:

All child protection concerns will be treated with utmost confidentiality and privacy. Only individuals directly involved in the investigation and response process will have access to the information, and it will be shared on a need-to-know basis. Confidentiality agreements may be required for individuals involved in child protection matters.

f. Partnership with Parents and Guardians:

The school will actively engage parents and guardians in the child safeguarding process. Information sessions, workshops, and resources will be provided to parents and guardians to educate them about child protection measures and help them recognize signs of abuse or neglect. Regular communication channels will be established to encourage parents and guardians to report any concerns they may have.

REPORTING AND INVESTIGATION

1. Recognize and Respond:

- a. Any staff member who suspects or receives information about a child protection concern will immediately take it seriously and respond appropriately.
- b. Staff members will document the details of the concern, including dates, times, locations, and any relevant observations or conversations.

2. Consult with the Designated Child Protection Officer:

- a. The staff member will report their concerns to the designated Child Protection Officer as soon as possible.
- b. The Child Protection Officer will provide guidance on the next steps to be taken and may initiate an internal investigation.

3. Internal Investigation:

- a. The Child Protection Officer will lead and coordinate with the PBIS Team to conduct an internal investigation into the child protection concern.
- b. The investigation will be conducted in a confidential and sensitive manner, ensuring the privacy and dignity of the child involved.
- c. Relevant information and evidence will be gathered, including interviews with staff, students, and any other individuals involved or with knowledge of the situation.
- d. The Child Protection Officer will seek advice from external agencies, such as local child protection services, if necessary.

4. Reporting to Child Protection Authorities:

- a. If there are reasonable grounds to believe that a child is at risk of significant harm or if there is an alleged child safeguarding issue, the Child Protection Officer must immediately report it to the appropriate child protection authorities as mandated by Philippine child protection laws.
- b. This involves reporting to the DSWD (Department of Social Welfare and Development) or its equivalent, following the specific reporting procedures and requirements outlined by the local authorities.
- c. The Child Protection Officer will maintain clear records of all actions taken and share them with the relevant authorities as required, ensuring compliance with local legal obligations and authorities.

Note: Under Republic Act No. 7610, the law that protects children against abuse, exploitation, and discrimination, any person who reports child abuse in good faith shall be immune from civil, criminal, or administrative liability.

5. Communication with Parents and Guardians:

- a. For alleged child safeguarding issues that have been reported to the appropriate child protection authorities, (DSWD or equivalent), it is the responsibility of the authorities to carry out the investigation and communicate with the relevant parties involved.
- b. The school will cooperate fully with the child protection authorities during their investigation, providing any requested information or assistance.
- c. The school will respect the investigative process and refrain from conducting an independent investigation parallel to the authorities' inquiry.
- d. Communication with parents or guardians will be coordinated with and guided by the child protection authorities, who will provide updates and information as necessary while ensuring compliance with legal requirements and maintaining the integrity of the investigation.

Please note the school will follow the specific procedures and guidelines set forth by the local child protection authorities in the respective jurisdiction. Their involvement in the investigation and communication process ensures a thorough and impartial examination of the alleged child safeguarding issues.

6. Support and Follow-up:

- a. The school will provide appropriate support to the child involved, which may include access to counselling services, pastoral care, or other resources.
- b. The Child Protection Officer will ensure that appropriate follow-up actions are taken, such as reviewing policies and procedures, providing additional training to staff members, or implementing preventive measures to avoid similar incidents in the future.

Note: child protection issues will always be handled in accordance with local laws, regulations, and school policies. It is essential to involve appropriate authorities and seek professional advice when necessary to ensure the safety and well-being of the child involved.

c. Support for Victims:

Appropriate support and assistance will be provided to child victims, ensuring their safety, well-being, and access to necessary services, such as counselling or medical care. Referrals to external agencies or professionals may be made when additional support is required.

d. Disciplinary Measures:

In cases where child abuse or misconduct is substantiated, the school will take appropriate disciplinary action, which may include termination of employment, reporting to authorities, or legal action, as deemed necessary. Disciplinary measures will be implemented in accordance with relevant laws and regulations.

MONITORING AND REVIEW:

The school will regularly review and update this Child Safeguarding Policy to ensure its effectiveness and compliance with evolving laws and best practices. Monitoring mechanisms will be implemented to assess the implementation of child protection measures and identify areas for improvement. Regular reviews will be conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of training programs, reporting mechanisms, and support systems.

CONCLUSION:

This Child Safeguarding Policy underscores the school's commitment to creating a safe and secure environment for children. By adhering to this policy, all staff, volunteers, and stakeholders contribute to the protection and well-being of children, fostering an atmosphere of trust, respect, and care within the school community.

ANNEX

Who is considered a child under R.A. No. 7610?

A child one who is below 18 years of age or one who is over 18 years of age but who cannot take care of himself fully because of a physical or mental disability or condition. What is child abuse? It is any act which inflicts physical or psychological injury, cruelty to or the neglect, sexual abuse of, or which exploits, a child.

What is cruelty?

It is any word or action which debases, degrades or demeans the dignity of a child as a human being.

Is discipline administered by a parent or legal guardian on a child considered cruelty?

No, if it is reasonably administered and moderate in degree and does not cause physical or psychological injury.

What physical injury is considered as child abuse?

One that causes severe injury or serious bodily harm to child, such as lacerations, fractured bones, burns or internal injuries.

What psychological injury is considered as child abuse?

One that harms a child's psychological or intellectual functions. This may be exhibited by severe anxiety, depression, withdrawal or outward aggressive behavior or a combination of said behaviors.

What is child neglect?

It is failure of a parent or legal guardian to provide, for reasons other than poverty, adequate food, clothing, shelter, basic education or medical care so as to seriously endanger the physical, mental, social and emotional growth and development of the child.

What is child sexual abuse?

It is the employment, use, persuasion, inducement, enticement or coercion of child to engage in, or assist another person to engage in sexual intercourse or lasciviousness conduct or the molestation or prostitution of, or the commission of incestuous acts, on, a child.

What is child exploitation?

It is hiring, employment, persuasion, inducement, or coercion of child to perform in obscene exhibitions and incident shows, whether live, on video or film, or to pose or act as a model in obscene or pornographic materials, or to sell or distribute said materials.

What is Child Safeguarding?

Child safeguarding refers to the actions taken to protect children from harm and ensure their well-being. It involves creating safe environments, implementing policies and procedures, providing training, and responding to concerns or incidents. The goal is to prevent harm and promote the rights and protection of children.

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