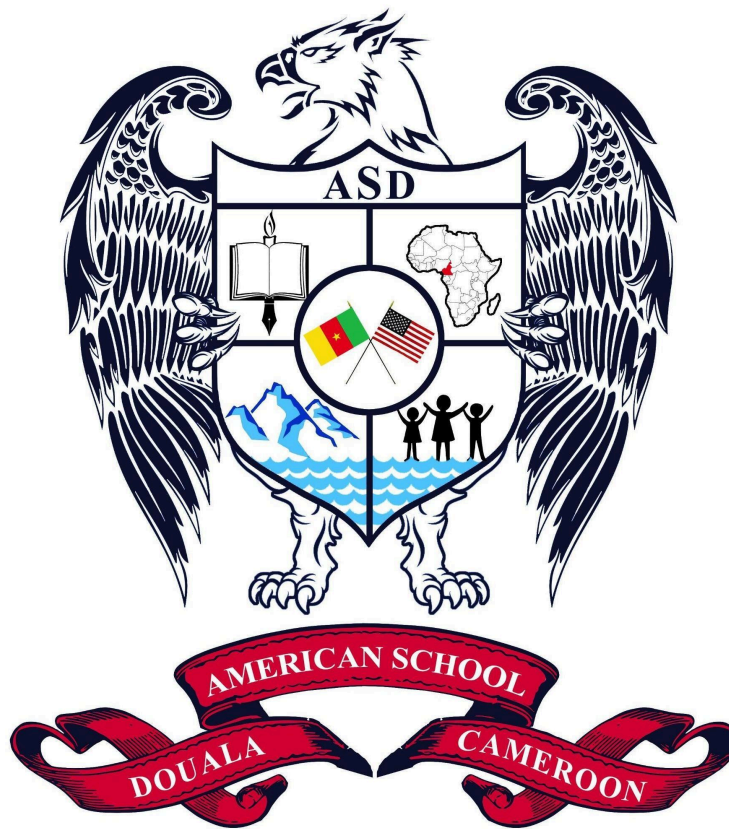




# 2023-24 Child Protection at ASD



# Child Protection at ASD 2023-24



August 2023-24

Dear Parents,

The American School of Douala School Board, in keeping with the ASD core beliefs and vision, has adopted a *Child Protection Policy* to guide our staff and families in matters related to the health, safety, and care of children in attendance at our school. This policy is so important to ASD that, as your director, I am required to send this letter to parents at the beginning of each school year reminding our community about this truly critical issue.

The *ASD Child Protection Policy* is based on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child of which Cameroon is a signatory. These two key articles from the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child are important and we wish to draw your attention to them:

### **Article 19 Protection from abuse and neglect**

The State shall protect the child from all forms of maltreatment by parents or others responsible for the care of the child and establish appropriate social programs for the prevention of abuse and the treatment of victims.

### **Article 34 Sexual exploitation**

The State shall protect children from sexual exploitation and abuse, including prostitution and involvement in pornography.

By enrolling your child at ASD, you agree to work in partnership with the school and abide by the policies adopted by the ASD Board members. All of us at ASD want you to know that we genuinely value our partnership with you in providing for the safety and care of your children. That is why the American School of Douala has endorsed a *Child Protection Policy* that defines the standards by which all ASD students should be treated with respect and dignity at all times.

As part of our overall educational program and specific to our shared responsibility to educate and to ensure a safe environment in which all children can learn and grow ASD will:

1. Provide age-appropriate lessons for all grade levels to help students understand personal safety, needs, and rights.
2. Provide parents with materials and information sessions to help you better understand our programs and policy.
3. Educate faculty on how to recognize and report issues of child abuse and neglect.

We will work together at home and school to ensure that our children are safe and knowledgeable about their rights and responsibilities to themselves and to each other, so they can grow and learn free of fear in a safe and supportive environment. I thank you for your support of our efforts and invite you to contact the school administration regarding any specific questions you may have in this regard.

Sean Goudie  
Director  
2023-24



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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. The American School of Douala endorses the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, of which our host country, Cameroon is a signatory.

School fills 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 need help and protection. As such, educators have a professional and ethical obligation to identify children who need 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 School of Douala must report suspected incidents of child abuse or neglect whenever the staff member has a 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 and neglect may be reported to the appropriate employer, to the respective consulate in Douala, to the appropriate child protection agency in the home county, and/or local authorities.

The American School of Douala seeks to be a safe haven for students who may be experiencing abuse or neglect in any aspect of their lives. As such, ASD 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 the children. In the case of a staff member reported as an alleged offender, the American School of Douala 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 on 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 needs of the more powerful person, either a member of the family, a teacher, or a peer. Research guides many 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 bodily function; 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 disregard for 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
- Child Protection at ASD.

### 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, torso
- Injuries inconsistent with information offered by child
- Immersion burns with a distinct boundary line
- Unexplained laceration, abrasions, or fractures



**Emotional Abuse** refers to a pattern of behaviors or tactics that are *intended* to intimidate, manipulate, or control another student's emotions, self-esteem, sense of self-worth, and/or mental health and/or overall psychological well-being. It involves a range of non-physical actions and words that are intended to inflict psychological pain and distress by exerting power and control over another student.

**Emotional Abuse can be exerted in the following forms:**

- **Verbal abuse:** use of harsh, demeaning, insulting, belittling, and derogatory language towards the victim with the intent to damage self-esteem and self-worth.
- **Humiliation and degradation:** engaging in actions that make the victim feel embarrassed, ashamed, humiliated, and worthless. This may include public shaming and criticizing.
- **Manipulation and control:** requiring the victim to engage in undesirable behaviors to avoid consequences from the perpetrator or controlling their actions/thoughts to isolate them from others.
- **Intimidation and threats:** using language or actions via coercion and verbal threats with the intent to cause fear in the victim. Threats can include physical harm to the victim, harm to friends or siblings, or other forms of punishment leaving the victim feeling helpless and alone.
- **Ignoring:** disregarding the victim's thoughts, opinions, needs, or emotions with the intent to socially isolate them from their peers.

**Possible Indicators of Emotional Abuse:**

- **Behavioral changes:** withdrawn, anxious, fearful, or engaging in avoidance behavior
- **Low self-esteem:** expressions of self-doubt or self-loathing; display of negative attitude toward self
- **Social withdrawal:** failure to interact with peers, participate in group activities, engage in hiding behavior, or have excessive absences minus valid reasons for being absent (e.g., medical, family, travel)
- **Changes in academic performance:** declining academic performance likely due to inability to concentrate, high levels of anxiety, and loss of interest or motivation
- **Unexplained physical complaints:** emotional abuse can manifest in headaches, stomachaches, fatigue, depersonalization/derealization
- **Inappropriate emotional responses:** display of inappropriate social and emotional responses (e.g., laughing or crying inappropriately).



**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:** ASD requires that if 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); and/or
- 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 drugs, specific examples may include verbal humiliation, refusing to acknowledge the presence of a child, invasion of privacy for no specific reason, violent threats, etc.)

**Possible indicators of neglect**

- Child is unwashed or hungry
- Child is denied food or water
- Parents are uninterested in child's academic performance
- Parents do not respond to repeated communications from school
- Child does not want to go home
- Both parents or legal guardian are absent from Douala, Cameroon for any period of 24 hours or greater
- Parents cannot be reached in the case of an emergency

**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.**



**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 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 is 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 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 a reasonable cause to believe that a child has suffered abuse or neglect. All reports are confidential.



## Child Protection at

### ASD 2023-24

**Cyberbullying** is oftentimes carried out by children who have access to various forms of technology. Cyberbullying can be defined as any form of bullying that involves electronic technology, such as devices and equipment, cell phones, computers and tablets, as well as communication tools, including social networking sites, messaging apps, gaming sites and chat rooms such as Facebook, Xbox Live, Instagram, YouTube, Snapchat and other chat rooms that can be great fun and a positive experience, text messages, chat, and websites.

#### Why is Cyberbullying Different?

Children who are being cyberbullied are often bullied in person as well. Additionally, kids who are cyberbullied have a harder time getting away from the behavior.

- Cyberbullying can happen 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and reach a kid even when he or she is alone. It can happen any time of the day or night.
- Cyberbullying messages and images can be posted anonymously and distributed quickly to a very wide audience. It can be difficult and sometimes impossible to trace the source.
- Deleting inappropriate or harassing messages, texts, and pictures is extremely difficult after they have been posted or sent.

#### Indicators of Cyberbullying

##### EMOTIONAL

- Becomes withdrawn or shy
- Shows signs of depression
- Is extremely moody or agitated
- Is anxious or overly stressed out
- Shows signs of aggressive behavior

##### SOCIAL/BEHAVIORAL

- Suddenly stops using the computer
- Changes eating or sleeping habits (e.g., nightmares)
- No longer wants to participate in activities once enjoyed
- Hurts self, attempts or threatens suicide
- Suddenly changes friends

##### ACADEMIC

- Doesn't want to go to school
- Gets into trouble at school
- Skips school
- Loses interest in school; drops in grades

#### Signs that a child may be cyberbullying others

- Stops using the computer or turns off the screen when someone comes near
- Appears nervous or jumpy when using the computer or cell phone
- Is secretive about what they are doing on the computer
- Spends excessive amounts of time on the computer
- Becomes upset or angry when computer or cell phone privileges are limited or taken away.

## **Child Protection at**

### **ASD 2023-24**

#### **How ASD is helping to Protect Our Children:**

##### **Hiring Process**

Although ASD always takes great care when hiring personnel, in accordance with this policy, all future hires will be required to complete an approved series of steps before joining our school team. The checklist is approved by our accrediting agency and requires specific background and reference checks for all potential employees.

##### **Admissions Process**

The school admissions process will clearly indicate that all families must provide proof of parentage and custody of children they are enrolling. This is especially important at an international school with both local and expat families to ensure all our children are in proper care of their rightful parents or guardians.

##### **Professional Conduct Code for Employees**

All school employees will be required to sign a code of conduct that clearly outlines proper procedures for interacting with children of all ages and maintaining a safe and healthy educational environment.

##### **School Outings and Trips**

All school outings will be supervised by more than one adult. All overnight or international trips will include at least a man and a woman if both male and female students are traveling. Appropriate guidance and training will be given to ASD families who host visiting athletes from other schools.

##### **Technology Acceptable Use Policy**

All users of the school internet and wifi will be expected to follow an acceptable use policy that will be published in the Parent Student Handbook.

##### **Professional Training for Teachers and Support Staff**

Each year all teachers will receive training on ASD's Child Protection Policy during orientation week. In addition, every employee is required to complete the Child Safeguarding Certification Training [Awareness Course or Level I] every two years of employment. This training will take place during orientation week prior to the start of classes at the beginning of the academic school year.

##### **Student Awareness Workshops**

The School Counselor/Child Protection Coordinator will host grade-level workshops for each grade twice a year; one workshop per semester for K5-G12. The workshops are designed to bring age-appropriate awareness to the students pertaining to the dynamics of abuse and elements of victimization including appropriate sexual expression and boundaries. Additionally, students will be provided with guidance and resources if they feel they are being subjected to any form of abuse, neglect, or bullying. The student awareness workshops will also contain components of sexual education for G6-12.

## Child Protection at

### ASD 2023-24

#### Effectively responding to disclosure of abuse by a student to a teacher or staff member

Where staff see signs that raise concern about possible abuse of a student, they should share their concern with a designated Child Protection Team member. If a child discloses abuse to a member of staff, the following should be noted:

- Do not let a child swear to secrecy before telling you something. You may need to report, which the child will view as breaking your trust with them.
- You can reassure the child that the information they give you will be treated sensitively and kept as confidential as necessary.
- You may want to suggest to the student that there are other people they can talk to, and who might be better placed to help them. However, it is important for the child to not feel dismissed.
- 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, not pressuring 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 confront the alleged abuser.
- If the child does not want to go home, this should be considered an emergency. Report and handle immediately by contacting a member of the Child Protection Team or the Director.
- Explain to the child that you must tell a member of the Child Protection Team 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.

# Child Protection at

## ASD 2023-24

### Procedures for reporting suspected cases of abuse, neglect

#### Step 1

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 take initial steps to gather information regarding the reported incident and will form a school-based response team as needed to address the report. The response team will include the school nurse, counselor, psychologist, and other individuals as the director 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) Report status of case to the Director
- 4) Determine the course of follow-up actions.

#### Step 2

Based on acquired information, a plan of action will be developed by the School-Based Response Team to assist the child and family. Actions that may take place are:

- Discussions between the child and counselor in order to gain more information. Depending upon the age of the child, these discussions may include drawing pictures and playing with dolls to elicit more information as to what may have occurred.
- In-class observations of the child by the teacher, counselor, or administrator.
- Meetings with the family to present the School's concerns.
- Referral of the student and family to external professional counseling.

In cases of severe abuse or where outside authority is deemed necessary, a request made to the Multidisciplinary Team (see chart, page 8) may result in further investigation and possible actions:

- Notification of the management of the sponsoring employer of the concern with the child/family, or to the welfare office at the home-of-record.
- Consultation with the consulate of the country of the involved family.
- Consultation with the school or another attorney.
- Informal consultation with local authorities.

#### Step 3

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 teacher use.
- The counselor will maintain contact with outside therapists and multidisciplinary teams to update the progress of the child in school.

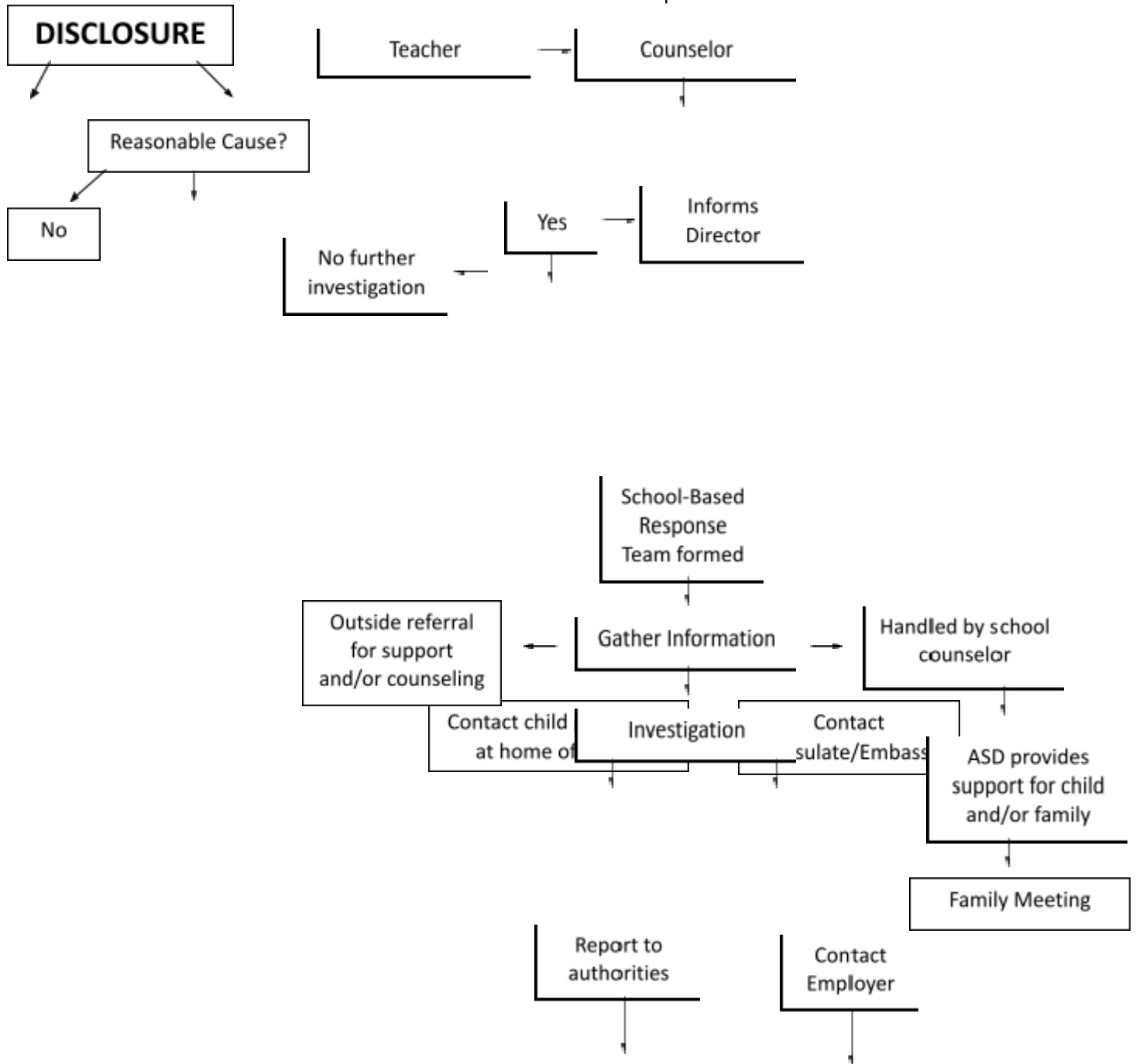
# Child Protection at

## ASD 2023-24

### When suspected abuse or neglect is reported...

When there is cause to suspect child abuse or neglect, it is the responsibility of the staff member to report their 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 superintendent of the suspected case of child abuse or neglect.

All staff, faculty and administration are mandated to report incidences of abuse and neglect. All ASD 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.



## Child Protection at

### ASD 2023-24

All documentation of the investigation will be kept in the child's confidential school records file. Records sent to the schools to which their student may transfer will be flagged to let the receiving school know there is a confidential file for the child. ASD will make every attempt to share this information to protect the child.

**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 sources, for example:**

- Mental health issues such as depression, psychosis, dissociation, suicide ideation.

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

- Severe and ongoing physical abuse or neglect
- Sexual abuse from 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:**

- Local authorities
- The consulate
- The employer
- The home-of-record welfare office

**The ASD child protection policy works for the child, for the family, and for our community**

Research indicated that international communities are as prone to child abuse as communities in their home country. Child abuse is a multi-faceted issue that involves the dynamics of the child, the family, and the community. The ASD Child Protection Policy works to respond at all three levels.

## Child Protection at

ASD 2023-24

# Safeguarding Students on Day and Overnight Field Trips

### 1. Pre-Trip Planning:

- Conduct risk assessments for each location and activity planned for the trip.
- Ensure that all venues are vetted for safety and accessibility.
- Plan itineraries that include safe transport routes and times.

### 2. Staff Responsibilities:

- Assign a sufficient number of chaperones based on the number of students and the nature of the activities.
- Ensure that all chaperones are trained on child protection policies and emergency procedures.
- Establish a clear code of conduct for staff and students, emphasizing respectful and safe behavior.

### 3. Communication:

- Provide students, staff, and parents with detailed information about the trip, including contact information for emergencies.
- Equip each group with a means of communication, such as mobile phones or radios.

### 4. During the Trip:

- Implement check-ins at regular intervals to ensure all students are accounted for.
- Maintain a strict adherence to the planned itinerary unless changes are necessitated by safety concerns.

### 5. Emergency Preparedness:

- Develop and carry detailed emergency response plans that include procedures for medical emergencies, lost students, and other potential incidents.
- Ensure that all staff have access to first aid kits and are familiarized with basic first aid.

### 6. Post-Trip Review:

- Conduct debriefings with staff and students to discuss what went well and what could be improved.
- Update risk assessments and safety protocols based on feedback and experiences from the trip.