American School of Yaoundé

Child Protection at ASOY

www.asoy.org

An important note for parents

Dear Parents,

I am writing to inform you of a matter that is of sincere personal interest to me and is one that I hope is of utmost importance to all of you. I would like you to know that the American School of Yaoundé School Board 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. In fact, I am required by this policy to send this letter to parents at the beginning of each school year. Thus, with this letter not only am I fulfilling my assigned duties, I also have the opportunity to write to you about this important aspect of our school's program.

The *ASOY Child Protection Policy 4.313* 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. Conventional 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 ASOY, you agree to work in partnership with the school and abide by the policies adopted by the ASOY Board members. All of us at ASOY 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 Yaoundé has endorsed a *Child Protection Policy* that defines the standards by which all ASOY 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 ASOY will:

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

Let's 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 your school counselor or principal regarding any specific questions you may have in this regard.

Sheena Nabholz
Director

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4.313 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 Yaoundé endorses the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, of which our host county, Cameroon is a signatory.

School fills a special institution 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 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 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 Yaoundé 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 Yaoundé, to the appropriate child protection agency in the home county, and/or local authorities.

The American School of Yaoundé seeks to be a safe haven for students who may be experiencing abuse or neglect in any aspect of their lives. As such, ASOY 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 implements 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 Yaoundé will conduct a dull 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.

How are abuse and neglect defined?

Definitions of abuse are complex and based in various cultures of child-rearing behaviors, gender and role responsibilities and expectations. The primary determination of abuse is that its dependent on some form of a relationship that is used to meet the need of the more powerful person, either a member of the family, a teacher, or a friend. Research guides much 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 of 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

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

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:** ASOY 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 presence of 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 Yaoundé, Cameroon for any period of 24 hours or greater
- Parents cannot be reached in the case of an emergency

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 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 the 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.

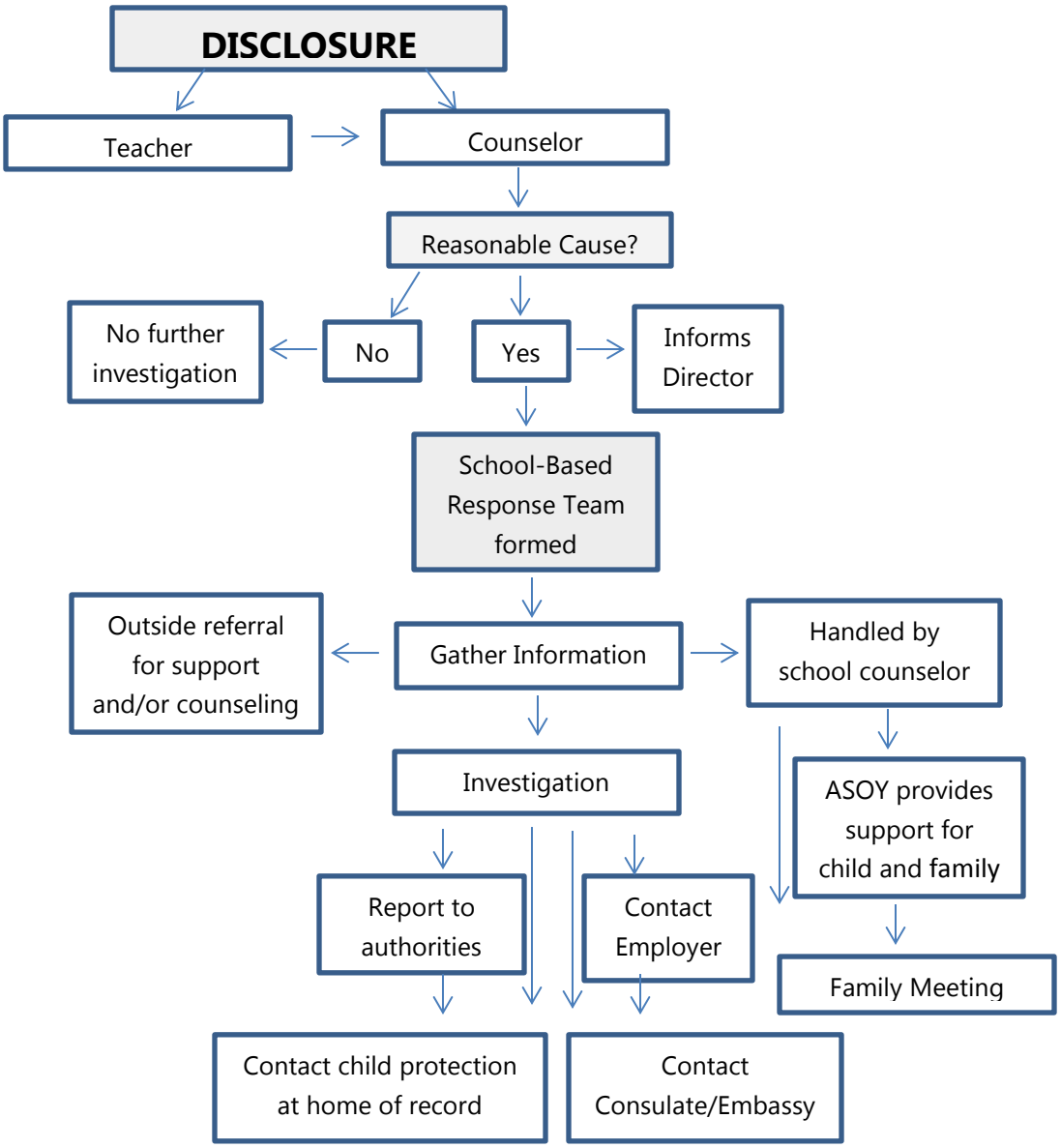
A report must be made when a staff member has a reasonable cause to believe that a child has suffered abuse or neglect. All reports are confidential.

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.

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 administrated are mandated to report incidences of abuse and neglect. All ASOY 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.



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 picture sand 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 sever abuse or where outside authority is deemed necessary, a request made to the Multi-Disciplinary 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

In the event that the abuse or neglect allegation involves a staff or faculty member of ASOY, the Director will follow board policy pursuant to ethical professional behavior.

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.

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. ASOY 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:

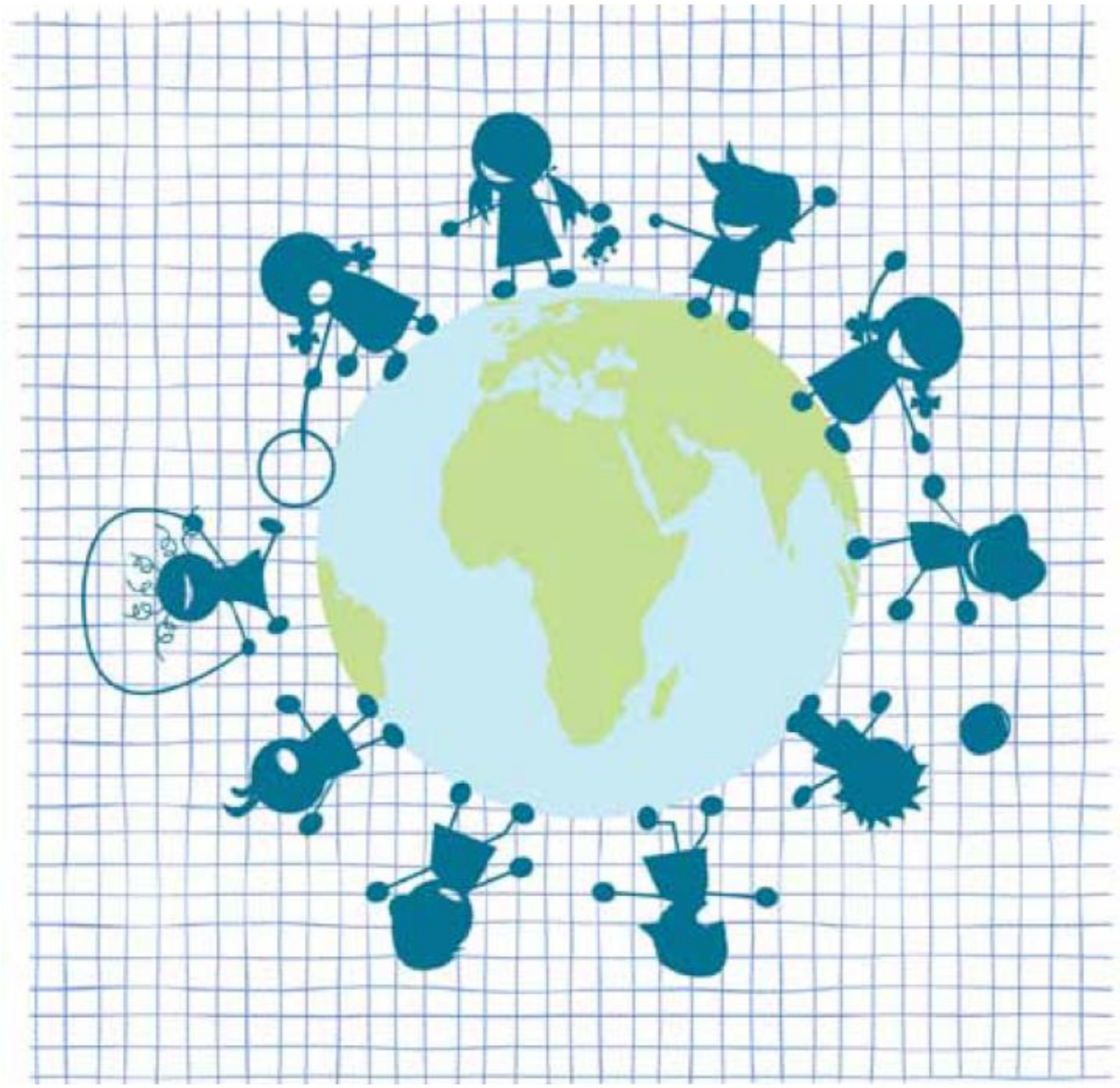
- Mental health issues such as depression, psychosis, dissociation, suicide ideation.

Cases reported for investigation and outside resources:

- Severe and ongoing physical abuse or neglect
- Sexual abuse and 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 ASOY 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 dynamics of the child, the family, and the community. The ASOY Child Protection Policy works to respond at all three levels.