

MAHATMA EDUCATION SOCIETY'S HOCL SCHOOL

CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

In keeping with our mission and ethos, Mahatma Education Society (MES) has adopted a Child Protection Policy. This Child Protection Policy aims to ensure that children attending our schools and colleges are protected from physical, sexual and emotional abuse. This policy will help guide our schools towards a safer, more effective, and clearer practices to safeguard the health and welfare of our students.

This important set of guidelines will help us work more uniformly and systematically to assure the appropriate protection of our students. As a Trust, we are committed to training our staff both teaching and non-teaching, appropriately and to keeping parents and students well-informed about the legal implication as well as systems in place for the protection of a child within our campuses.

This Child Protection Policy is based on Indian and international laws namely, The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012 (POCSO) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

We invite you to contact the school counsellor or Principal regarding any specific questions you may have in this regard.

DEFINITION OF A CHILD

As per the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act (POCSO) of 2012, the child is “any person below the age of 18”

DEFINITION OF CHILD ABUSE

This policy gives definitions of the widely understood categories of child abuse. Child care professionals and POCSO agree that child abuse falls within four categories:

1. Physical abuse
2. Sexual abuse
3. Emotional abuse
4. Neglect

Physical abuse covers all aspects of physical punishment, beating, slapping and the use of excessive force against a child. Children may display the external traits of excessive physical punishment, the most obvious being bruises and abrasions on the skin some of which may be old or faded.

Sexual abuse covers all aspects of inappropriate sexual behaviours between children, and between adults and children. Inappropriate touching, observing and displaying of the sexual organs represent sexual abuse. Sexual penetration of a child by an adult or of a younger child by an older child, is the most serious example of child abuse.

Emotional abuse can take many forms but the intention behind such abusive behaviour is to belittle the child and to undermine their feelings of self-worth. Emotional abuse can involve insulting behaviours, rejection and withdrawal of emotional warmth, blaming and sarcasm.

Neglect is widely regarded as pernicious lack of care for a child. Often children are neglected as part of a cycle of generational neglect within a family, where good parenting has never been learned or practised from generation to generation. Neglect is often demonstrated through inconsistent parenting, lack of physical care, poor hygiene and nutrition.

In addition to the above our Child Protection Policy also recognises the following-

Ragging, bullying and harassment-

In India the term ‘ragging’ has been widely used in reference to bullying in schools and other institutions of learning. Ragging is a wide-ranging concept most frequently used to describe physical bullying and harassment of students by their peers. The term may however cover aspects of the first three categories in the list above, not simply physical abuse but with elements of sexual and emotional abuse as well.

Cyber Bullying means any form of intimidation or harassment, using a computer, communication device or computer network or the Internet.

CODE OF CONDUCT FOR THE STAFF

All staff members (teaching, non-teaching and support staff) are made aware of and have received training on our Child Protection Policy, international and national laws through continuous training. They are also aware of the specific roles and responsibilities for safeguarding children. The school recognises and has systems in place to deal with the above mentioned forms of abuse.

Expected Behaviour and Actions

1. All staff members must treat children with respect and dignity regardless of the race, colour, gender, language, religion, political or other opinions.
2. All staff members must monitor their behaviour towards students, and pay close attention to peers to ensure appropriate and respectful behaviour.
3. All staff members must listen to children and respect their views.
4. All staff members should be affectionate, caring and understanding to the requirements and needs of the children.
5. All staff members must be responsive in case any special need of the child arises such as health issues or emotional support.
6. All staff members must ensure that physical contact, if any, with a child is respectful, culturally appropriate and essential to the purpose of your interaction with the child.
7. All staff members must establish an atmosphere that fosters the development of children through their actions and words.
8. All staff members must always take permission from children before taking their photos or videos.
9. All staff members must keep all personal information about children or their parents/guardians confidential and secure and ensure that such information is dispensed to only those individuals who are legitimately entitled to it.

10. All staff members must comply with all relevant Indian and state legislations, including all child related laws.

Prohibited Behaviour and Actions

1. No staff member should ignore the child or look down upon their ideas or suggestions.
2. No staff member will engage in physical punishment against a student. This includes any form of beating, slapping or use of any instrument to inflict pain on a child. These examples are not exhaustive but constitute physical abuse and criminal behaviour.
3. No staff member should use language or behaviour towards children that is inappropriate, harassing, abusive, and/or sexually provocative. These examples are not exhaustive but constitute physical abuse and criminal behaviour.
4. No staff members should engage in any communication with a child within or outside of school duties, that may make the child uncomfortable or that may be seen by an observer to be violating boundaries.
5. No staff member should engage with children in any form of sexual intercourse or sexual activity including paying for sexual services or acts. These examples are not exhaustive but constitute physical abuse and criminal behaviour.
6. No staff member should engage in any form of intimate relationship with a student. This includes sharing of personal information including photographs of a sexual nature. These examples are not exhaustive but constitute physical abuse and criminal behaviour.
7. No staff members should induce or support physical or sexual relationships with children, in any way.
8. No staff member should use or encourage the use of alcohol, drugs, cigarettes or other intoxicating substances while interacting with children and from providing such intoxicating substances to children.
9. No staff member should develop any form of relationship or arrangement (financial or otherwise) with children which could in any way be deemed to be exploitative or abusive. Do not use child labour in any form.
10. No staff member should act in any way that is inappropriate or prohibited as per Indian and state laws for children.

IDENTIFYING ABUSE AND REDRESSAL OF COMPLAINTS

All staff members should be vigilant in observing students' behaviours. Every staff member shall always be sensitive to the needs of the students with whom they have been entrusted and should be open and available as a first point of contact should they be approached.

If a person has knowledge that an offense has been committed or belief or apprehension that an offense is likely to be committed must report it to the Counsellor and Principal or any senior member of the School immediately.

Such persons as stated above should not conduct their own investigation or look into the matter. The Principal, Counsellor and Management will discuss and take appropriate actions and in case of violation of law report the matter to the local police/ Special juvenile police unit/ Child helpline 1098/ State commission for protection of child rights.

RECRUITMENT AND MONITORING OF STAFF

MES strongly believes that the first step to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children in the school, is to ensure recruitment of credible staff. As per our policy, recruitment of meritorious and credible staff is significant for ensuring the safety of children.

We work pro-actively works to ensure meritorious and credible recruitment of teaching and administrative staff. We ensure that the recruitment process attracts, selects and retains staff who would successfully and positively contribute to the future development of the school apart from looking after the safety and welfare of the students.

Due diligence through detailed enquiries are made, including feedback from the references and a comprehensive background check before the applicant is recruited as a member of the teaching/ administrative staff.

As a part of the recruitment process, interviews of the applicants are conducted by an interviewing panel. The panel assesses the applicant's attitude towards children as also his/ her ability to safeguard and promote welfare of children in the school. The School clearly talks about the knowledge of Child Protection to the interviewee.

DEALING WITH FALSE ALLEGATIONS

Staff should act in a responsible manner at all times in relation to students. On very rare occasions children make false allegations against adults who are entrusted with their care. These false allegations may be as a result of a desire to harm a teacher. What is certain is that whether or not an allegation is subsequently proven to be untrue, the reputation of a teacher can be destroyed along with considerable emotional damage being inflicted on the teacher and his or her family. Therefore, all staff should take steps to protect themselves from unwarranted accusations of unprofessional conduct, including abuse, by acting at all times in a professional manner

FINAL NOTES

Every complaint regarding inappropriate behaviour or communication with a child, shall be taken cognizance of by the management of the School. However, whether or not a particular behaviour or action constitutes inappropriate conduct, or is in contravention of the aforesaid Code of Conduct or this Child Protection Policy, will be a matter determined by the management, having regard to the relevant facts and circumstances. The findings and decision of the management of the School shall be final.

For any further concerns please feel free to contact-
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