

CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

Preamble

Children are the future of every society, of every nation, and of the world. Childhood is the most impressionable and the most vulnerable period in the life of a human being and, in terms of human development potential, qualitatively, it is also the most fertile. But, in a world which is fashioned and governed entirely by adults, children need protection, in the home, in the school and in the larger society.

Children today grow up in a volatile environment, characterized by rapid social changes and the erosion of traditional cultural and behavioural values. The dangers to children, inherent in such instability, cuts across all segments of society, irrespective of economic and social status, ethnicity, religion and geographic location. These dangers pose serious challenges to parents and educators and also present challenges and risks to the well-being of the children themselves.

When parents entrust children to the custody of the school, they do so with implicit faith that the child will be safe in the school. As an organization committed to the nurturing of children, we wish to demonstrate to all our stakeholders and the external society, that we have in place a clearly articulated policy to safeguard our children. It is designed to protect our children from any kind of abuse, verbal, emotional or physical, and from any type of exploitation and negligence.

For the successful implementation of the policy, whilst the school pledges to do its part, it also requires the active cooperation of all stakeholders. The policy will conform to both internationally recognized covenants and the existing laws of the country governing child protection. In addition, it will possess elements specific to the remit and philosophy of Lyceum International Schools.

Child

The United Nations Convention of the Rights of the child (UNCRC), defines a child as an individual who has not reached his/her 18th birthday.

Policy Objective

It is to create a protective and caring environment, in which children are safe from harm, physical and emotional, and that which provides them the freedom and opportunity to develop in to useful citizens. It addresses not only legal rights and obligations, but wide-ranging general care and well-being, and education in the context of its broadest meaning. Apart from class-room learning, it will consider the provision of leisure and opportunities for participation in social and cultural activities and other pursuits, which encourage and harness individual creativity.

It is based entirely on a human rights perspective and whilst addressing possible risk factors to the child's well-being, will also create in the child an awareness of risk and reinforce his/her strength and resilience to resist abuse.

LYCEUM POLICY

Guiding Principles

- Recognizing the best interests of the child.
- Policy framework which addresses prevention of harm to children.
- An action framework which provides for early recognition of threat/harm and an immediate response, thereto.
- A system of reporting which precedes, and enables both prevention and corrective action.

Our policy, therefore, will be a two-pronged strategy, preventative and responsive.

PREVENTATIVE- A set of guidelines and parameters designed to ensure protection, briefly described below.

Threat Identification

A primary function: As mentioned in the preamble, the rapidly evolving nature of both global and national society, poses risks and threats to children, which require frequent evaluation. Key areas are:

- Emotional abuse- through verbal abuse or threatening attitudes towards the child.
- Physical threats and actual abuse.
- The potential for children to be lured into substance abuse.
- Internal threats such as peer pressure and “bullying”, which can be from co-students or even from school staff.
- The risk of sexual threats and abuse- improper advances to, or improper conduct with the child.
- Dangers posed by the unregulated use of, and the unsupervised access, to social media and information platforms. This includes improper exposure of children by unscrupulous parties, to social media, whether with or without consent.
- The emotional risk to child well-being, inherent in the acquisition of, or exposure to knowledge and information, which the child is not mature enough to process.
- Neglect, both physical and psychological, which can take many forms and originate in areas outside the school as well.
- The identification of possible obstacles and impediments, which prevents the child from deriving the best benefit from educational and other facilities that the school provides. Such factors could be both internal and external.
- The policy has been designed, and will be implemented, in awareness of the fact that a threat to the child’s well-being can arise from within the school, from the home, from guardians and, or, relations.

Children’s Best Interests

To be a primary consideration and the recognition of the child’s rights - entitlement to protection, provision and participation within a context of political, economic, social and basic human rights.

Equal Opportunity

The school provides equal access to all the facilities ensuring the child's physical and emotional development in an environment which acknowledges the child's value, irrespective of the child's status - whether social, economic, religious, ethnic or gender

Cultural Sensitivity and Recognition of Diversity

The recognition of the multi-cultural and multi-layered nature of the student body within a nation with social, ethnic, religious and economic diversity and stratification; ensuring that no child feels marginalized, unloved or otherwise limited on account of any aspect of his or her personal status. Essentially, giving the child comfort in the knowledge that his or her individuality is recognized, respected and does not pose an impediment to achievement. This dimension is perceived as being of prime importance in the case of children with special or different abilities.

Accountability and Responsibility- Staff Training

Educating all staff, other service providers to the children of the school, and any individual, or any group that may interact with the students, of the nature and context of the Protection Policy, the non-negotiable nature of both its conditions and the parameters, and the importance of its strict implementation, in both spirit and the letter.

Staff Training

School staff will be trained to be alert and to be aware, with whom the student may interact and, also, to watch for signs of behavioral or attitudinal aberrations and irregularities that may be an external manifestation of internal conflict, arising from a breach of protection.

Such a breach may be physical or emotional, or the deprivation of any of the material or spiritual/emotional inputs that contribute to the child's happiness and wellbeing. The source of such conflict may be either in the school or even in the home.

Parental Education and Awareness- Consultation

There will also be periodic evaluations of the policy as well as discussions with parents, to educate them in regard to both national and international conventions regarding child protection, and of the potential threats to child's welfare, that exist in the external environment. These discussions will also focus on educating parents on strategies to counter such potential threats, as well as the immediate and most effective course of action to take in the case of an actual event.

Training and Workshops

The issues dealt with in the policy document will be discussed with members of school staff. There will be special workshops organized for parents and students. Each group will be made aware of both their specific and shared responsibilities and their contribution to the successful implementation of the policy.

Staff training will be a multi-faceted exercise, encompassing policy awareness, recording of referrals, self-training and the training of subordinates by the immediate superior.

In regard to children, there will also be instruction and advice to children, conveyed by trained members of staff, on possible threats to the children's well-being and the manner in which children should deal with such issues. Extreme care will be taken to ensure that such instruction is conveyed in a manner which the child is able to process, in the context of the child's age. The school will also ensure that whatever advice is given to the child, it will not infringe on individual cultural and religious sensibilities, or in any way impact adversely on the child's relationships within and outside the school.

Documented Guidelines

In regard to the students, there is a Code of Conduct embodied in the students' record book and the students' handbook, which also specify the corrective action procedure, in case of certain violations. As for the staff, there is the Teachers' Handbook and the Standing Orders, which regulate every aspect of their conduct within and outside the school.

For parents and guardians, there is a separate Code of Ethics.

Confidentiality

There will be protection of all personal information regarding its students that the school may possess, and its sharing will be on a strict, need-to-know basis, even within the school administration.

Interaction with External Agencies

There will be regular interaction and discussions with external agencies and bodies (Department of Probation and Child Care Services, National Child Protection Authority, Police Unit of the NCPA, etc.) directly involved in issues related to child protection, in order to assess threat levels, potential risk areas, new and emerging threats, and for assistance on designing strategies to meet such contingencies. Such interactions will be with both governmental bodies and accredited, non-governmental organizations.

School Teaching Staff and Other Personnel Recruitment

Our recruitment policy provides for a comprehensive background verification and personality evaluation of candidates, prior to recruitment, to ensure that recruits are both technically and psychologically suitable for the education of children, in conformity with the Lyceum philosophy.

The policy also provides for the monitoring of staff behaviour, conduct and nature of interaction with the children, as an ongoing, continuous process. The separate Sectional Heads/Immediate Supervisor will be responsible for this aspect.

All applicants for positions, whether permanent, temporary/contractual, or for voluntary assignments, are selected on basis of a stringent evaluation of suitability.

RESPONSIVE

We have a structured action programme in place in the event of a breach of any condition of the policy;

- Reporting procedure for issues regarding suspected or actually disclosed instances of abuse. The pathway provides for the child, in case of need, to approach any member of the staff with whom he/she has confidence in or feels comfortable to talk with.
- Even if an instance of any form of abuse is not reported by the victim, any member of staff who perceives or suspects the occurrence of such abuse, will immediately bring the issue to the notice of the student counsellor officer without trying to investigate it herself/himself.
- The appointment of an experienced member of staff, who may be a Student Counsellor, as the lead point of contact in the implementation of the Child Protection policy.
- In the absence, or the unavailability of the above, the school Warden or the Officer-in-Charge of Discipline will initially handle the issue concerned.
- The investigative process into any issue, irrespective of the nature of the event or incident, will be conducted with the utmost concern for confidentiality. Access to information, reports or any other knowledge will be restricted to a strict, “need-to-know” basis, the prime concern being the child’s well-being.
- For girl students with grievances, provision of access to a female teacher.
- The first step on receiving a report of any kind of violation would be for the Student Counselling Officer, or his/her designate, to document a comprehensive narrative of the issue.
- The Student Counsellor will then set in place the remedial or corrective strategy, or any other appropriate plan of action.
- Depending on the nature and the severity of the issue or the incident, it may be escalated to external agencies who mediate, investigate, or institute appropriate preventive and punitive action in such cases. Such an agency, in the first instance, may be the National Child Protection Authority.
- Before referring an issue to an external agency (Department of Probation and child Care Services, National Child Protection Authority, Police Unit of the NCPA, etc.), there will be a discussion with the parents concerned, if in the view of the school management, the nature of the event warrants such prior discussion. The decision of the school management will be based on the best interests of the child under the specific circumstances.
- The investigative processes and remedial action in respect of any incident will be implemented without infringing on the personal freedoms and rights of the child concerned.
- In the case of certain violations of the code of behaviour, particularly in relation to student discipline, the school management may, at its discretion, decide to implement punitive or corrective action as deemed fit. However, all forms of corporal punishment are banned and all members of staff are aware of this condition and will act accordingly.

- Written records of all reported cases and their conclusions are kept in the school and remain confidential.
- Each school will have a Child Protection Committee, consisting of three internal members appointed by the relevant Principal. Depending on the nature of an incident or issue, two external members with special expertise (Lawyers/Doctors) may be co-opted to the committee, as decided by the Principal.
- The response to child-to-child abuse focuses on what is best for the development and protection of all children involved in such a case.
- If there is any accusation against a staff member and if it is seen that the accusation has substance, the staff member will be asked to stop work until a full investigation has taken place. If the investigation proves that the accusation is true, the staff member will be asked to resign depending on the seriousness of the accusation.

The policy issues discussed and encapsulated in this document have been dealt with separately, in the appropriate sections of the Teachers' Guidelines, Parents' Guidelines and the Students Handbook.