



Child Protection Handbook

Special thanks to our sources:

- International Centre for Missing & Exploited Children (ICMEC)
<http://www.icmec.org/education-portal/>).
- International Task Force on Child Protection (ITFCP)
<https://www.cois.org/about-cis/child-protection/international-taskforce-on-child-protection>
- StopBullying.gov <https://www.stopbullying.gov/>
- Association of Colombian-Caribbean American Schools (ACCAS) and other International Schools around the world

Chapter 1

Introduction and Definitions

Child Protection Statement

La Sierra International School commits to ensuring the healthy development of our students and to protecting them from harm.

Introduction

LASIS complies with local and international legal requirements related to child protection and seeks to be a safe haven for students who may be experiencing domestic violence or abuse in any aspect of their lives. The Founders of La Sierra International School hold strong beliefs about the importance of educating children to become “Leaders with Heart”. The phrase defines us and summarizes the school’s primary goal: to educate young people to be ethical leaders who are distinguished by their values, environmental awareness, and the courage to build a better world. Staff and families alike are expected to commit to this goal and ensure an environment that nurtures good character and protects the health, well-being, and safety of all members of the community. These beliefs are deeply embedded in the life of the School and guide all decisions.

LASIS is committed to promoting a safe and secure environment by protecting all students in our care. In order to achieve this goal, we have in place a caring staff focused on individual student well-being and success, a values program that infuses six core values into the school culture (Trustworthiness, Respect, Responsibility, Fairness, Caring and Citizenship), organizational and administrative policies that monitor and address issues related to health, safety, and well-being, an administrative staff trained in child protection, and various additional components and activities designed to support children and young people, maintain a safe environment, and create a feeling of family.

The elements mentioned above are described in detail in the School’s Mission, Vision, *Manual de Convivencia*, and other documents. In everyday practice, students are held to a high standard of behavior that is modeled by all staff members. The development of personal qualities leading to good values, high levels of success and harmonious personal relationships are strongly encouraged. Students and staff are expected to be kind and show consideration for others. Rudeness and abuse are never accepted. The primary goal relating to student behavior is to develop a sense of responsibility that results in an internal desire to make ethical decisions and follow acceptable behavior patterns for one’s own good and the good of others. Among other things, this includes recognizing and taking appropriate action when faced with unacceptable behavior towards oneself or others. Although the responsibility for teaching values and holding high standards for behavior rests first and foremost at home, LASIS recognizes its responsibility to work in every possible way toward these goals. The home and school, working as a team, coordinate efforts to build character, ensure child safeguarding, and provide a positive atmosphere in which everyone is accepted, supported and cherished.

LASIS uses a careful selection process for new staff members and administrators in order to

employ ethical individuals who care deeply about children and young people, hold positive expectations for them, and are willing to give the time and energy necessary to meet the needs of individual students. The hiring process seeks well-qualified, experienced, and competent professionals with good values whose lifestyle is a positive influence in the lives of students. These components have allowed LASIS to produce exceptional results in the areas of social and emotional well-being, character development, school climate, and academic achievement.

Staff members in every area of the School's operation receive training or information in matters related to health, safety, and student well-being. Counselors and Principals provide support and training in the implementation of the Character Counts! Program. The entire Administrative team along with several Board members attended a two-day workshop on the topic of Child Protection given in Colombia by the International Centre for Missing and Exploited Children.

A recent survey of thirty new students in both sections of the School, some of whom had experienced bullying in previous settings, demonstrated the success of these efforts. Survey results indicated a 100% positive response rate regarding student-teacher relationships, receiving support when needed, and feeling part of a family.

This Handbook is the result of trainings, guidelines published by U.S. and Colombian government sources, and the generous sharing of resources by other international schools. It provides relevant information about child protection issues and the policies and procedures employed in our School to address them. The Handbook gives employees access to information they will need should anything ever happen.

Definitions and Indicators of Abuse, Neglect, Exploitation and Bullying

Domestic Violence: This is a crime typified by the Colombian Criminal Code, which consists of physically or psychologically abusing any member of the family. It is understood that domestic violence may occur within family members who live together, in a different household, or even any other person who permanently lives under the same domestic unit. (For more information, see Colombian Criminal Code, Article 229)

Child Abuse: Is any form of physical or psychological abuse, neglect, omission, or sexual exploitation, including sexual abuse, and in general, all forms of violence or aggression against the child or adolescent, by parents, legal guardians, or any other person. (For more information, see Colombian Childhood and Adolescence Code, Law 1098 of 2006).

According to Decree 1965, Article 40, of 2013, child abuse is classified into three types:

- Type I: Abuse that involves physical injuries or harm to the child or adolescent's body.
- Type II: Chronic psychological or emotional abuse, such as continuous threats, that affect the child or adolescent mentally and morally.
- Type III: Abandonment or neglect, which places the unattended child or adolescent's life or health at risk

it is of critical importance that all LASIS adults are consciously looking for the signs and indicators of these possible situations.

Possible indicators of domestic violence and child abuse include:

- Student does not want to go home or is afraid to have the school contact parents
- Improbable excuses given to explain injuries such as bruises, sprains, etc.
- Depression, sadness
- Evidence of neglect, having inadequate supervision at home, poor nutrition, poor hygiene
- Repeated urinary infections or unexplained stomach pains
- Parents do not respond to repeated communications
- Parents do not provide the recommended support or actions recommended by LASIS
- Being aggressive toward others.
- Both parents are absent for extended periods, without appropriate provision made for child's care
- Parents cannot be reached in the case of emergency
- Student receives negative messages at home ("good for nothing"), or expectations that are not appropriate for the age or development level

Emotional Abuse

Any pattern of behavior that impairs the child or adolescent's emotional development, sense of self-worth, or self-esteem such as constant criticism, threats, verbal rejection, name-calling, insults, or put-downs on a regular basis. The nonverbal patterns of behavior can include isolation, ignoring, or rejection on a regular basis

Possible indicators of emotional abuse include:

- Delayed physical, mental, or emotional development.
- Alcohol or drug abuse.
- Low self-esteem
- Poor social relationships
- Sleep disorders
- Self-destructive tendencies (cutting, thoughts of suicide, head-banging)
- Antisocial or destructive behavior
- Obsessions or phobias.
- Inappropriate emotional responses to painful situations.
- Chronic stealing or lying

Sexual Abuse and Online Exploitation

Sexual abuse against children and adolescents is any act of sexual behavior, exercised over a child or an adolescent, using force or any other type of physical, psychological, or emotional coercion, taking advantage of conditions of helplessness, inequality and relations of power between the victim and the aggressor. At times children might not recognize that they are being abused, which is why adults need to be alert to possible indicators.

While physical abuse may be the unplanned result of immediate stress, sexual abuse requires

planning, referred to as “grooming,” and often results in victims accepting the blame, responsibility, guilt, and shame for the sexual behavior of the offender.

Grooming requires more secrecy and emotional coercion than other forms of child abuse, so it is more difficult to report. Through the process of grooming, victims are taught that the sex is a form of love. They tend to love their offender and often appear to be happy and well-adjusted children or adolescents with no negative symptoms due to their perception of being loved and doing something normal.

Sexual abuse may include:

- Intentionally touching, either directly or through clothing, the private parts of a child for other than hygiene or child care purposes.
- Engaging in sexualized non-contact activities, such as involving children in the production or viewing of pornographic material or encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways.

Possible Indicators of Sexual Abuse and Grooming Include:

- Mention of special treatment from an adult, or a new “secret” friendship with someone
- Unexplained gifts or new possessions
- New patterns of behavior involving late-night chatting or use of internet
- Increase in online followers or friends
- Anxiety
- Avoidance of family, friends and usual interests
- Age-inappropriate sexual knowledge, language, or provocative behavior
- Regressive behavior, like bedwetting or stranger anxiety
- Venereal disease
- Physical trauma or bleeding in the oral, genital, or anal areas
- Difficulty in walking or sitting

Early warning signs in potential sexual offenders.

Signs of adult offenders:

- Having a “favorite” student.
- Attempts to find ways to be alone with children.
- Inappropriate language, jokes and discussions about students.
- Sexualized talk in the presence of students.
- Private gifts or private chats, in person or online.

Signs of student offenders:

- Unusual or exaggerated interest in sex, sexualizing inanimate objects and activities.
- Continuation of sexual misbehavior when told to stop.
- Having secret friends

Procedures for Reporting Suspected Cases of Domestic Violence or Child Abuse

Chapter 2 Prevention

LASIS seeks the well-being of all students by ensuring a caring, supportive school environment where children and adolescents feel safe and protected. As a community, we are obligated to take strong proactive measures as far as we are able in order to prevent child abuse and mistreatment. We will therefore respond promptly to any suspected case in which a student may be a victim, or may be at risk of becoming a victim, of domestic violence or abuse. Educators, having the opportunity to observe and interact with students over time, are in a unique position to identify students who may need help and protection. As such, educators have a professional and ethical obligation to identify students who are in potential 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 domestic violence or child abuse.

All staff employed at LASIS must report suspected behavior of domestic violence and/or child abuse whenever the staff member has reasonable cause to believe that a student has suffered or is at risk of violence or abuse. It is also expected that any adult visitor or volunteer at CNG will report any suspected cases to administration in a timely fashion. Reporting and follow up of all suspected incidences of domestic violence and/or child abuse will proceed in accordance with the procedures outlined in this manual.

Given the above, all LASIS employees are responsible for reading and complying with the guidelines contained in this Handbook and in the following Code of Conduct:

CHILD PROTECTION CODE OF CONDUCT

This Code of Conduct applies to all teachers, staff, administrators and other adults who work with LASIS students or who carry out work on campus that may bring them in contact with students.

LASIS is a safe place where students feel at home, cared for, and protected from all types of aggression and mistreatment and where their dignity, intimacy and rights are respected. All interactions with minors must be respectful. This Code provides guidance for appropriate and expected conduct. The list below is not exclusive. Teachers, staff and others are expected to use professional judgement and common sense to avoid actions that may be seen as disrespectful, inappropriate, or potentially abusive towards minors. If any such actions are observed or suspected they must be reported.

General Expectations

- Treat all students with respect and dignity and do not discriminate with regard to physical, social, or personal characteristics of any kind.
- Report any suspicion of possible abuse, bullying, or other mistreatment in accordance with the guidelines in this Code and in the Child Protection Manual.
- Teachers and Staff are expected to be good role models and to promote kind treatment, positive communication, and peaceful resolution of conflicts.

Actions and behaviors such as these will not be tolerated. The listing is not exclusive.

- Shouting, insults, use of sarcasm, offensive language, rude comments and behaviors that are aggressive, hostile, threatening, or degrading.
- Any act of physical or emotional abuse such as hitting, shaking, slapping, grabbing, humiliating, or making fun of students.
- Being alone in an enclosed space with a minor unless visible through a door or window or unless required by the nature of the employee's duties (Psychologist, Nurse).
- Personal contact with students outside school. This includes meetings, phone calls, gifts, invitations to personal events, texting, contact through social media, or other means.
- Maintaining an exclusive friendship or a sexual relationship with a minor.
- Using, possessing, or being under the influence of any kind of tobacco product, alcohol, or other psychoactive substance in the presence of students, in or out of school.
- Use of personal devices to take pictures or make video recordings of LASIS students unless permitted by a supervisor. Use of personal Facebook, Instagram, Twitter or similar accounts to share student photos or videos.
- Overly physical behavior or contact with students that may be interpreted as inappropriate within the social and cultural context of the community (this may include kissing, touching, hugging, etc.)
- Inappropriate or sexually provocative language or behavior in the presence of students or engaging in other behaviors that violate modesty or good taste ("dirty" jokes, anecdotes about sexual situations, comments about personal relationships, etc.)
- Showing or making available on personal devices photos, videos, or other images of a sexual or pornographic nature, even if the exposure was unintended. Looking at pornography while working or engaged in school activities. Involving students in pornographic activities.
- Visitors to campus, contractors and occasional workers may not take pictures of the school facilities, students, or staff. If required by the nature of the work, limited permission may be given by the administration.

Duty to Inform

Anyone who has a concern or suspicion related to the content of this Code is obliged to inform a School Counselor, Principal, the General Manager or the School Director.

Acknowledgement of Receipt and Agreement with the Code of Conduct

I have read and I understand the Code of Conduct. I agree to abide by the guidelines outlined in the Code and in the Child Protection Manual. I agree to cooperate fully with any investigation related to child protection. I agree to report any concern, suspicion, or certainty I may have about possible abuse, mistreatment, or disrespect involving a student.

I understand that failure to comply with any part of the Code of Conduct, or participation in any other inappropriate behavior related to child protection and as determined by the School, may lead to disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment.

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Chapter 3

Disclosure and Follow-Up

Policies and Procedures for Disclosure, Reporting, and Follow-Up

All students, parents, visitors and LASIS employees are mandated to report promptly any suspicion of a conduct that may indicate domestic violence and/or child abuse.

It is the responsibility of the staff member to report his or her suspicions to the Counselor or to the Principal. It is the responsibility of the Principal to inform the School Director of the suspected case. Students, parents, or visitors with any suspicion of domestic violence and/or child abuse are expected to report to a Counselor or Administrator. In all cases, the School Director will be notified as soon as possible in order to take appropriate action which may include meeting with the Child Protection Team. Team members are:

Laura Horbal, School Director
Liliana Caliz, Elementary Principal
Marlon Dominguez, Secondary Principal
Maria Paulina Fernandez, Elementary Counselor
Diana Gomez, Secondary Counselor
Gustavo Alvarez, General Manager

In cases of sexual abuse or sexual violence, LASIS staff must follow the procedures set forth in the Comprehensive Care Route for School Coexistence (*Ruta de Atención Integral para la Convivencia Escolar*) referred to in Colombian Law 1620 of 2013. Additionally, Colombian Law 1146 of 2007, establishes the obligation to report any conduct or indication of violence or sexual abuse against children and adolescents to the competent administrative and judicial authorities.

What To Do If A Child Discloses Abuse

- Listen calmly so you can report the information accurately to the Counselor or Principal who will determine next steps.
- Teachers are not investigators and should not confront the alleged abuser or discuss what they heard with the student's parents, therapist, or other staff members.
- If a child wants to swear you to secrecy before telling you something, do not agree. Tell them you may need to speak to someone they trust, such as the Counselor or Principal, for their own safety.
- Don't be judgemental and don't ask for details. Don't criticize the alleged abuser because it may be someone the child loves.
- Reassure the student that
 - The student did the right thing by telling you.
 - You are sorry that someone hurt the student.
 - No one deserves to be abused.

- No matter what the student did or did not do you will do everything you can to help, which may involve getting the help of someone else the student trusts at school.
- Concentrate on the immediate needs of the student; ask what the student needs or wants right now. Ask if he or she feels comfortable reporting the abuse himself or herself to the Counselor, Principal or Director, and if it would help if you were present. If the student agrees, accompany the student to the appropriate office.
- If the child does not want to go home, this should be considered an emergency. Report it immediately by contacting a member of the school's Child Protection Team. The team should meet immediately to decide on an appropriate plan for the child.
- If the disclosure occurred during an outside school or after-school event, do not take the child home with you. Wait with the child until you hear from the Child Protection Team.
- Be honest with the student, and don't make promises you can't keep.
- Document the disclosure in writing, with date, time, and your signature.
- Keep the disclosure confidential, other than reporting to school administration and, if appropriate, to local authorities.

STEPS TO BE FOLLOWED IN CASES OF SUSPECTED ABUSE OR MISTREATMENT

STEP 1 - RECEIVING A REPORT & GATHERING INITIAL INFORMATION The Counselor will take initial steps to gather information regarding the reported incident. The risk for the student's safety and well-being must be assessed as soon as possible so that immediate measures can be taken to ensure further protection of the student. The time elapsed between the moment the School is made aware of the children/adolescent protection concern until the moment the case is reported to the Comité de Convivencia should generally not take longer than 24 hours in most cases. In more serious cases, a more urgent response might be necessary. In all cases, follow-up activities will be conducted in a manner that ensures information is documented factually and that confidentiality is maintained. If there is a sense of immediate risk to the child or members of the family, the School's internal procedures, as described below, need to be carried out with a sense of urgency. The following procedure will guide the administrative actions:

Guidelines for Reporting and Action

If there is reasonable cause to believe that child abuse occurred, the Counselor must document all aspects of the investigation and resulting actions. Appropriate actions are based on specific details disclosed by the child and may be different in each situation.

After consultation with the School's legal advisors, one or more of the following actions may be taken depending on the specific case (actions listed are not in sequence and are not all mandatory but will depend on the case):

- Inform parents
- Conference with involved students
- Meet with parents and students
- Meet with others pertinent to the case
- Contact the school nurse
- Refer the child for a psychological assessment

- Assign mandatory counseling sessions
- Refer the case to the Child Protection Team
- Report to local authorities responsible for child protection
- Report to an embassy if a foreign national is involved
- Pursue legal action

In the event that the abuse or neglect allegation involves a staff or faculty member, LASIS will follow policies and procedures to ensure child and adolescent safety and ethical professional behavior. Actions taken may include:

- Opening and development of a disciplinary labor process
- Complaint before the competent police and judicial authorities
- Immediate administrative leave
- Full internal or external investigation

STEP 2 - AFTER INITIAL INFORMATION GATHERING

Based on acquired information, a plan of action will be developed to assist the student and family. 1. Actions that may take place are as follows:

- Discussions between the student and Counselor in order to gain more information. Depending upon the age of the student, these discussions may include drawing pictures and playing with dolls to elicit more information as to what may have occurred
- Further in-class observations of the student by the teacher, Counselor, or Principal
- Meetings with the family to present the school's concerns
- Consultation with Child Protection Team
- Referral of the student and family to external professional counseling.
- Consultation with the school's attorney or other legal counsel.
- Report any behavior to the competent administrative and judicial authorities.
- Referral to the School Co-existence Committee

All actions will be carried out with absolute confidentiality and protecting at all times the right to privacy and personal data of the student

2. Determine the course of follow-up actions which may include:

- a. Closing the case
- b. Further internal investigation
- c. Internal plan of action
- d. Initiate external investigation (consultants, legal counsel, law enforcement, embassy, etc.)
- e. Report case to the competent administrative and judicial authorities

STEP 3 - FOLLOW-UP

1. The Principal and Counselor will collaborate to create a follow-up plan which may include:

- Maintaining contact with the student and family to provide support and guidance as appropriate;

- Providing the student's teachers with ongoing support;
- Providing resource materials and strategies for teacher use;
- Maintaining contact with outside therapists to update the progress of the student in school.

2. Frequent status reports of case to the School Director.

3. Determine the course of follow-up actions which may include:

- Closing the case
- Internal plan of action

All documentation of the investigation will be kept in the student's confidential records file.

IN CLOSING

LASIS remains committed to promoting a safe and secure environment by protecting all children and adolescents in our care. Based on this commitment, LASIS will maintain this Child Protection Manual, inform parents of key information related to child protection, teach students appropriate skills and knowledge related to domestic violence and/or child abuse, provide annual training for all staff on key responsibilities, and make every effort to implement strict hiring practices to ensure the safety of our students.

It is worth mentioning that most cases of suspected violence and/or abuse will be handled by our 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 resources, 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.

In extreme cases when families fail to stop abuse or if concerns remain about the safety of the child or adolescent, LASIS reports to the competent judicial authorities and institutions.