



International School of Estonia

Child Safeguarding Policy

October 2023

Introduction

International school communities are vulnerable to abuse because the nature of abuse requires secrecy, insularity, isolation and limited access to support resources, which are some characteristics of the international community. International schools must respond to the reality that these characteristics are exactly the characteristics that perpetrators will use to their advantage in abusing children.

Child abuse is a multifaceted issue that involves dynamics of the child, the family, and the community. In international communities we can assume that child abuse occurs, that certain factors and characteristics of international communities make expat children vulnerable to abuse, that international schools tend to be isolated from social service resources.

An important part of the Mission of ISE is to: "Support a safe, caring, respectful environment that values creativity, diversity and inclusivity." The ISE Child Safeguarding Policy seeks to provide that environment at school, as well as identify and support students who may not live in a safe, caring or respectful environment at home.

Definitions

Child Safeguarding is defined as proactive measures taken within the school to limit the risk of direct and indirect harm to children caused by abusive behaviour.

Child Protection is defined as the steps the school takes to make the world beyond the school safer for children.

Abusive behaviour is defined as neglect of a child and/or mistreatment in a manner that endangers their mental, emotional or physical health.

Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL): The DSL is the trained member of ISE staff who takes lead responsibility for child safeguarding within the school and protection beyond the school gates.

The Care Team comprises the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL), the Principal-Coordinator/s (P/C) relevant to the situation, The School Director and the teacher/s filing a report.

'Child', 'student' and 'youth' are used interchangeably in this document. They refer to someone under the age of 18 who is enrolled in the school. While the majority of ISE students are minors, this policy also applies to enrolled students who have reached the age of majority (18) in Estonia.

UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

The International School of Estonia endorses the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, of which our host country is a signatory and seeks to be a safe haven for students who may be experiencing abuse or neglect in any aspect of their lives.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child includes 54 articles to which governments are expected to be signatories. The principal articles, relevant to ISE, include:

Article 3: The best interests of the child must be a top priority in all decisions and actions that affect children.

Article 12: Every child has the right to express their views, feelings and wishes in all matters affecting them, and to have their views considered and taken seriously.

Article 19: [Governments] must do all they can to ensure that children are protected from all forms of violence, abuse, neglect and bad treatment by their parents or anyone else who looks after them.

Article 39: Children who have experienced neglect, abuse, exploitation, torture or who are victims of war must receive special support to help them recover their health, dignity, self-respect and social life.

Estonian Child Protections Act 2014.

The International School of Estonia endorses and abides by the Estonian Child Protections Act (2014)

The full Act is here: <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/ee/506052015001/consolide/current>

Key Principles.

§ 5. Rights and well-being of children

Upon ensuring the rights and well-being of children, the following principles provided for in the convention shall be based on:

- 1) every child has the inherent right to life, survival and development;
- 2) every child has the right to equal treatment without any discrimination;
- 3) in all action concerning children, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration;
- 4) every child has the right to independent opinion in all matters affecting the child and the right to express his or her views.

§ 6. Prevention

(1) In order to ensure the rights and well-being of the child, the risks threatening the well-being and development of the child must be prevented. Prevention includes the perception of situations and events which threaten the child as early as possible and the reaction thereto, including the identification of the child's development and behaviour problems, problems occurring in the family environment, identification of abuse and the increase of protective measures promoting the child's well-being and development.

(2) State and local government agencies shall, according to their possibilities, develop measures in order to prevent the child's need for assistance and to decrease the existing problems. The measures must be based on the child's needs, support the relations between the child and the persons raising the child, support the social performance skills and they must be accessible, timely, effective and have a long-term positive effect.

The Role of the School

The International School of Estonia has an institutional responsibility to safeguard and protect children. In this role we need to ensure that students in our care are afforded a safe and secure environment in which to grow and develop. As educators, we have the opportunity to observe and interact regularly with children and over time are in a unique position to identify children who may be at risk. As such, we have a professional and ethical obligation 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.

We also have a responsibility as an organisation to take proactive measures within the school that reduce or prevent opportunities, behaviours or actions that may contribute to, or support abuse or neglect.

ISE reserves the right to pursue suspected abuse cases to the full extent of national and international law. Cases of suspected child abuse or neglect may be reported to the appropriate child protection agency in Estonia or the child's home country.

The International School of Estonia will distribute this policy annually to all parents, will communicate this policy annually to students, will provide training for all faculty and staff, and will make every effort to implement hiring practices to ensure the safety of children.

The Role of School Staff

ISE staff are expected to regularly familiarise themselves with this policy and annually sign the staff code of conduct. All faculty and staff at the International School of Estonia have a professional obligation to be vigilant towards abuse and neglect and to report their concerns about the well being of any student. Staff should also be aware of possible

situations where students are being groomed (prepared) for some type of abuse and report it in the same way as abuse of neglect.

Reporting and follow up of all suspected incidences of grooming, child abuse or neglect will proceed in accordance with procedures within this policy.

To report your concerns, use the template here: [Safeguarding Report Template](#)

While it is not the School's policy to monitor the conditions in which and under which the students live, staff members have a professional obligation to be vigilant towards neglect and abusive behaviour. This includes, but is not restricted to the following:

- **Physical abuse** - non-accidental injury including burns, human bites, and beatings which have been intentionally inflicted;
- **Sexual abuse** - where a child is used for the sexual gratification as in obscene conversation, exposure to pornographic material, exhibitionism, molestation, incest, rape, or sexual exploitation (including digital media);
- **Emotional abuse** - unreasonable demands in an excessive or aggressive manner such as habitual and inappropriate teasing, verbal abuse that demeans and belittles the child, bullying, and lack of love, support or guidance (including digital media);
- **Neglect** - inadequate supervision, persistent lack of provision of basic human necessities, (food, clothing, shelter, medical care), or the failure to protect the child from exposure to any kind of danger (including cold and starvation) and which affects the child's health or development. In some cases, faculty or staff may hear of students who are home alone or with minimal supervision for a period of time.
- **Disguised Compliance** - For schools working with children and families, staff will likely have established relationships with parents or carers and experience of working with them. A parent's or carer's behaviour can make it difficult for school staff to recognise abuse or neglect at an early enough stage or delay reporting it. Disguised compliance involves care-givers presenting an appearance of being co-operative and supportive in order to avoid scrutiny, suspicion or concern.
- **Self abuse** - includes incidents of self-harm (cutting, substance abuse, unhealthy eating habits, over exercising, etc.
- **Medical abuse** - when someone gives false information or knowingly doesn't share information about illness in a child that requires medical attention, putting the child at risk of injury and unnecessary medical care.

There is more information here:

<https://www.scie.org.uk/safeguarding/adults/introduction/types-and-indicators-of-abuse>

The Role of the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL)

The DSL role is guided by two principles:

- The welfare of the child is always paramount.
- Confidentiality should be respected as far as is reasonably possible.

Being guided by these principles the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) will:

- Play a key role in ensuring that the school takes action to support child safeguarding and any student who may be at risk.
- With the Director, make sure that all staff, both teaching and non-teaching, are aware of their responsibilities in relation to safeguarding and child protection.
- Collate and keep accurate and confidential records of any concerns about children.
- Ensure that the school community knows about the role of the DSL and who they can go to for support.
- Be familiar with local regulations, procedures and agencies who can offer support for safeguarding matters.

ISE Child Safeguarding Identification and Reporting Procedure

A. Identification

Members of the School Personnel are well placed to observe and report outward signs of abuse or neglect. Care must be taken as such signs can only be a cause for suspicion and are not, in themselves, proof that abuse has occurred. Unexplained changes in behaviour or changes in school performance may indicate abuse. Inadequate clothing, poor growth, or apparently deficient nutrition may indicate physical neglect, while attention seeking or excessive dependence may point to emotional neglect.

If you have a concern that a student is self abusing, being abused or neglected, you must report it to any Care Team member immediately.

If you observe the actions of a staff member or student towards another student that you consider abusive or neglectful, you must report it immediately.

In addition, school personnel should encourage students to self-report abuse. If a student self-reports abuse or neglect to a staff member, that staff member must immediately file a safeguarding report on behalf of the student. Staff should never promise a student that they will not tell anyone about a report of abuse, as this may not be in the student's best interests. If necessary, the staff member should inform the student that they (the staff member) have a legal obligation to report suspected abuse or neglect.

To report your concern/s, use the template here: [Safeguarding Report Template](#)

Safeguarding Report of a Staff or Student's Actions.

In the event of a Safeguarding report about a staff member's actions towards a student, investigative procedures will be conducted by the School Director and the HR Manager with support from relevant Principal/Coordinators. The member of staff may be required to remain off school premises for the duration of the investigation. If the allegation is made against the Director, the investigation will be led by the Chair of the School Board.

Confidentiality

In situations where a report is to be made about the actions of a staff member, the school will act to protect the confidentiality of the staff member making the report.

In the event of a Safeguarding report about a student's actions toward another student, the investigation will be led by the Designated Safeguarding Lead and the Dean of Students. The accused student may be required to remain off school premises for the duration of the investigation. Distance learning will be provided to the student by the school. In this situation the school will act to protect the confidentiality of the student making the report.

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B. In School Follow-up After A Report Has Been Made.

These steps will be followed after identification of suspected abuse or neglect:

1. Identifying staff must report suspected abuse/neglect immediately to any Care Team member who is required to immediately inform the other members of the Care Team (If any member of the care team has been reported, they must be left out of the process.) **The staff member must not conduct an investigation on their own.**

Use this form to make your report. [☰ Safeguarding Report Template](#)

2. Immediately, or within 24 hours of a report having been made, The Care Team must meet to assess;

- If a suspected abuse/neglect situation exists
- If the suspected neglect/abuse presents an imminent threat

The care team may consult the wellness coordinator, the school psychologist, the dean of students, the special educational needs coordinator and anyone else they deem as able to provide important information or context when making this decision. Members of the care team may interview the student without parental permission.

A summary of the process is outlined in the graphic on the next page.

Responding To A Child Safeguarding Report

International School of Estonia

A written or oral report is made to any
Care Team member (DSL, P/C or Director).

Care team + reporting staff member meet immediately/within 24
hours to decide if the report represents a child safeguarding concern.

Yes

Unsure

No

Is there an
imminent threat?

Yes

No

Care Team act immediately
to protect child/ren.

Wellness Staff
DoS
Homeroom/Advisory

Care Team investigate and
gather information.

External or Internal Resolution

External or Internal Resolution

Take no further action,
monitor or refer to
wellness staff.

The ISE Care Team is:

- The Designated Safeguarding Lead
- The Principal-Coordinators
- The School Director.

C. Follow-up with Parents and/ or External Organisations.

If it is considered that the abuse/neglect is potentially unlawful, life threatening, extreme or imminent.

If a real and imminent concern of abuse is identified, then instead of the school's investigations continuing, the school will refer the case to the Estonian Child Protection Authority, and/or the Police.

As part of the investigation, the School may interview the student and conduct a non-invasive physical examination of a student without parental/caregiver presence or permission.

Less Extreme/Imminent Situations

In cases not fulfilling the criteria above, a meeting between members of the School's Care Team and the parent/s/caregiver/s will be arranged. They will be informed of the suspected abuse, the School's child protection policy and given a printed copy of that Policy. While each situation will be handled on a case-by-case basis, it is the intention of the School for one or more of the following to take place depending on individual circumstances.

1. Family counselling - the family will be directed to identify and access support in order to resolve this situation.

This might conceivably be;

- The ISE Psychologist
- A family counsellor in the community.
- External Estonian or International child and family support agencies
- The Estonian Police
- Their respective Embassy.

With parental/caregiver permission, the school may collaborate with outside support agencies to ensure that the family is making every effort to resolve the situation.

2. Referral to the Estonian Child Protection authority by the Director. If step 1 is not successful or agreed upon, the Director will notify the Estonian Child Protection Authority and ask them to intercede on the student's behalf. Again, if it is considered that the abuse/neglect is unlawful, life threatening, extreme, and/or it is deemed the child should be immediately removed from the home, the civil authorities will be notified immediately and if necessary without parent notification/consent.

At the conclusion of the meeting the Parent/s/Caregiver/s will be requested to complete and sign a document (Appendix 1 of this handbook).

After the process described above, there may be the need for emotional support for staff, students and families involved. As appropriate, this may involve Wellness Staff.

Appendix 1



ISE Safeguarding Parental Notice

Date:

I/We, the parent/s or caregiver/s of _____, have read and understand International School of Estonia's Child Safeguarding Policy. We have been informed by the school of a suspected abuse or neglect situation.

- Abuse
- Neglect
- Other (Please Specify)

We agree to undertake to following action/s in order to resolve the situation

- Counselling with the ISE Psychologist
- Counselling with a suitably qualified external professional
- Access support from Estonian Social Services
- Other (Please specify)

We agree for the school to contact these support professionals in order to understand how the situation is being resolved.

We understand that ISE considers this matter to be of a very serious nature and will notify the Child Protection Authority and/or the Courts of Guardians if we refuse to sign this form, refuse to begin and/or complete a counselling program or if the school is informed of another suspected abuse.

Parents/Caregiver Name/s:

Signature/s

Witness Name:

Signature