

LORETO CHILD SAFETY AND PROTECTION POLICY

"Be wholly God's and keep to your utmost all He has left in your charge."

- Mary Ward

The overriding concern of Loreto institutions is the care, welfare and safety of the children entrusted in our care. The Loreto House Educational Society of Calcutta has developed policies and procedures which are revised from time to time, to safeguard the students and provide appropriate support for those in need.



What is 'Child Abuse'?

The World Health Organisation in its Report of the Consultation on Child Abuse Prevention at Geneva in 1999, defined Child Abuse or maltreatment as *"all forms of physical and/ or emotional ill- treatment, sexual abuse, neglect or negligent treatment or commercial or other exploitation, resulting in actual or potential harm to the child's health, survival, development or dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust or power."* The Ministry for Women and Child Development too defines child abuse as, "Any act, deed or word which debases, degrades or demeans the intrinsic worth

and dignity of a child as a human being." It may arise out of an intended act or failure to act or an omission to prevent harm to a child.

What are the different types of acts or omissions which may constitute 'Child Abuse'?

It is important to note that children may experience more than one type of cruelty or abuse simultaneously. Some of the broad categorisations are as follows:

(i) Physical Abuse:

As defined by the Ministry of Women and Child Welfare in a study on child abuse, physical abuse is "inflicting of physical injury upon a child. This may include slapping, hitting, punching, shaking, kicking, beating or otherwise harming a child in any way physically even when the parent or caretaker may not have intended to hurt the child. It may even be the result of over disciplining or physical punishment that is inappropriate to the child's age."

(ii) Verbal Abuse:

Any kind of irresponsible use of words that hurts or belittles children would be considered verbal abuse. It even refers to the use of words by a parent, care-giver or teacher that can devastate, wound, ruin reputation and destroy relationships.



(iii) Emotional Abuse:

Any type of ill-treatment, which causes adverse effects on emotional development and psyche, would be emotional abuse. It may involve conveying to children that they are worthless, unloved, or inadequate. This may be done through verbal or non-verbal means i.e. through signs and motions, or communications in any other form.

(iv) Sexual Abuse: Sexual abuse of a child, according to the definition adopted by the American Psychological Association, is the dominant position of an adult that allows him or her to force themselves upon the child. This also includes gender-based harassment, i.e. targeting someone for not following sex-role stereotypes.

(v) Neglect:

Neglect is the persistent failure or deliberate denial to meet a child's basic physical and/or emotional and/or psychological needs for good health and development, causing grievous, long-term harm to the child's health or development. Neglect is a lack of action, emotion or basic needs.

(vi) Child Exploitation:

This is using a child unfairly for one's advantage. When someone grooms or controls a child for an illegal purpose, including sexual intentions, it amounts to exploitation. This includes befriending, gaining their trust, giving drugs, alcohol or gifts and asking them to perform sexual acts as a favour or in exchange for something.

(vii) Online Child Exploitation:

Grooming children online for the purpose of sexually abusing them would also be exploitation. This would involve adults befriending children through online chats, "sex-ting" and stalking them online in view of sexual involvement or any personal gain or advantage.

(viii) Bullying, Intimidation and Isolation:

This includes any wilful, conscious behaviour intended to hurt another person, either physically or emotionally through words or deeds. Bullying can be directly from the bully to the victim (e.g., through physical intimidation or attacks, verbal abuse, unwanted attention and advances, damaging property), or it can be indirect (e.g., through spreading malicious rumours). It will also include cyber-bullying (e.g., sending unpleasant SMS messages, photographs or emails, to the victim or to others).

Recognising Signs of Different Types of Abuse:

Children rarely tell adults about abuse. They may be hesitant, confused, scared or uncertain. Sometimes they may share information piecemeal, sometimes take hours, weeks, months, or even years and even after disclosing it they might even deny the abuse ever happened. Signs and symptoms of children in need of care and protection need to be understood for proper remedial measures to be implemented to help and guide such children. Some of these signs may appear through emotional distress, psychological stress, particular disorders and physical injuries.

SIGNS OF PHYSICAL, EMOTIONAL AND SEXUAL ABUSE IN CHILDREN:



Common Signs

- a) Irritability/crying
- b) Aggression
- c) Problems at school
- d) Fear of adults
- e) Drug or alcohol abuse
- f) Poor self esteem and self image
- g) Self destructive or suicidal behaviour
- h) Depression
- i) Drastic changes in appetite and / or sleep
- j) Over compliance or excessive aggression
- k) Withdrawal
- l) Secretiveness
- m) Stubbornness
- n) Clinginess and other attention seeking behaviour
- o) Fear of a particular person



Signs of Physical Abuse:

- a) Unexplained burns, cuts, bruises
- b) Bite marks or welts in the shape of an object
- c) Fractures
- d) Excessive crying
- e) Describing adults as 'evil' or in some other negative way





Signs of Sexual Abuse:

- a) Has difficulty walking or sitting; has pain or rashes
- b) Refuses to change in front of other children of his/her age
- c) Demonstrates excessive, bizarre, sophisticated or unusual sexual curiosity, knowledge or behaviour
- d) Avoids conversation related to sexuality
- e) Pays excessive attention to or rejects his/her own body not in keeping with other children of the same age
- f) Reduced self care and grooming
- g) Becomes pregnant or contracts a venereal disease
- h) Medical complaints such as UTI etc.

Signs of Emotional Abuse:

- a) Apathy – sad, long face, brooding or indifferent, hopelessness
- b) Lack of concentration
- c) Threatening e.g. says, wants to leave the home



Roles and Responsibilities of Staff:

The staff, especially the teachers, must be involved in safeguarding children's wellbeing. The school teachers are responsible for providing a safe learning environment for children, where they could identify children who may be in need of extra help or who are suffering, or are likely to suffer, significant harm. An atmosphere must be created, where teachers encourage students to report any fear or apprehension of sexual abuse to any person in whom the student has trust and confidence, so that appropriate measures can be taken to address these.

It must be borne in mind that abused children are vulnerable. They may manifest abnormal behaviour and may reveal themselves only over a period of time. As custodians of children, the teachers must be aware of the signs of abuse, and know what to do in line with the spirit of this policy to protect these children and give them proper and adequate guidance, help and assistance as may be required.



If a child wishes to report a case of abuse the concerned, Staff members are required to:

- 1 Provide a safe environment in a comfortable and confidential setting with full attention to the child
- 2 Maintain a calm demeanour – rather than reacting with shock, horror or anger
- 3 Be sensitive and attentive to the child, so as to assure him/her of protection
- 4 Ask open ended questions to obtain information. Be specific and to the point.
- 5 Let the child explain and describe in his/her own words. Do not interpret in the words of an adult (with unnecessary details)
- 6 Explain to the child how the staff member or school can help- without making any promises or commitment on behalf of the school
- 7 Maintain absolute confidentiality and respect the privacy of the child
- 8 Discreetly record/document the conversation in verbatim if possible – as opposed to a general account of the discussion

CHILD PROTECTION COMMITTEE

- ▶ The Loreto Child Protection Committee should consist of **at least 5** competent persons of whom **not less than half shall be women;**
- ▶ The Child Protection Committee must be headed by the Secretary of the Managing Committee of the School, who shall be designated the Chairperson of the Committee;
- ▶ The Child Protection Committee shall have a Secretary who shall be the Principal of the School;
- ▶ The Committee must have as its mandatory members **(i) at least one** Child Protection Officer (nominated/appointed from amongst the staff), **(ii)** a psychologist/counsellor, and **(iii)** a parent of an existing student who is professionally qualified or competent in health, medicine, psychology or child affairs;

- ▶ The other members of the Committee shall be those chosen by the Managing Committee for their commitment to the field of education, or their wisdom/prudence/expertise in administration or in the field of social work and service, or for their legal acumen – in the event such a person is not willing to or is for some reason restrained from being a member of the committee, he/she may be invited as a Consultant/Facilitator/Expert Advisor.
- ▶ The Committee shall be nominated by the School Managing Committee within a period of two weeks from the start of the Academic session, and the members shall meet within a period of two weeks thereafter to, familiarise themselves with the contents of this policy and what is expected from them in terms of the internal regulatory framework, as well as the legal guidelines, laws and policies relating to Child Protection in schools.
- ▶ The Committee shall thereafter meet as and when necessary. The formation and existence of this Committee shall be publicised in the institution with due dissemination of the committee, its members and procedures through notices for information to students, parents and staff.
- ▶ The Child Protection Committee shall have tenure of **three years** unless earlier dissolved by the School Managing Committee for whatever reasons.
- ▶ The Child Protection Committee shall meet at least **once in three months** to discuss any matters of significance.
- ▶ The Child Protection Committee shall maintain records of all materials relating to complaints or enquiries in separate files for each incident or complaint, and shall prepare an annual report of all such incidents, complaints, the manner in which they have been dealt with and disposed of. Such reports shall be simultaneously forwarded to the Managing Committee of the School at the end of the Academic Year, and also to the Secretary of the Founder Body for perusal and necessary action and/or guidance if necessary.



Child Protection Committee – Qualities and Objectives

The Child Protection Committee should act not only as a corrective mechanism, but also as a preventive one. Any child who apprehends an incident, or who is subject to any form of an incident, or who has witnessed an incident, should be able to approach the Committee for immediate response. In absence of the Committee's meetings or availability, **three contact persons** must be nominated who can serve as an immediate contact point in all regards.

The Child Protection Committee shall strive to demonstrate and act in a manner that ensures the comfort of students, staff, parents and anyone associated with the institution.

Child Protection Committee – Functions and Powers

Secretary:

The Secretary of the Child Protection Committee shall be the Principal of the Institution concerned, and shall record the minutes of the meetings, deliberations and decisions and take any steps as authorised and/or directed by the Committee on its behalf. If for any reason the Secretary is unavailable or otherwise disqualified from acting, the Chairperson shall step in and nominate any of the other members as the Acting Secretary for the time being subject to further actions of the Managing Committee and/or Founder Body in this regard.



Child Protection Officers:

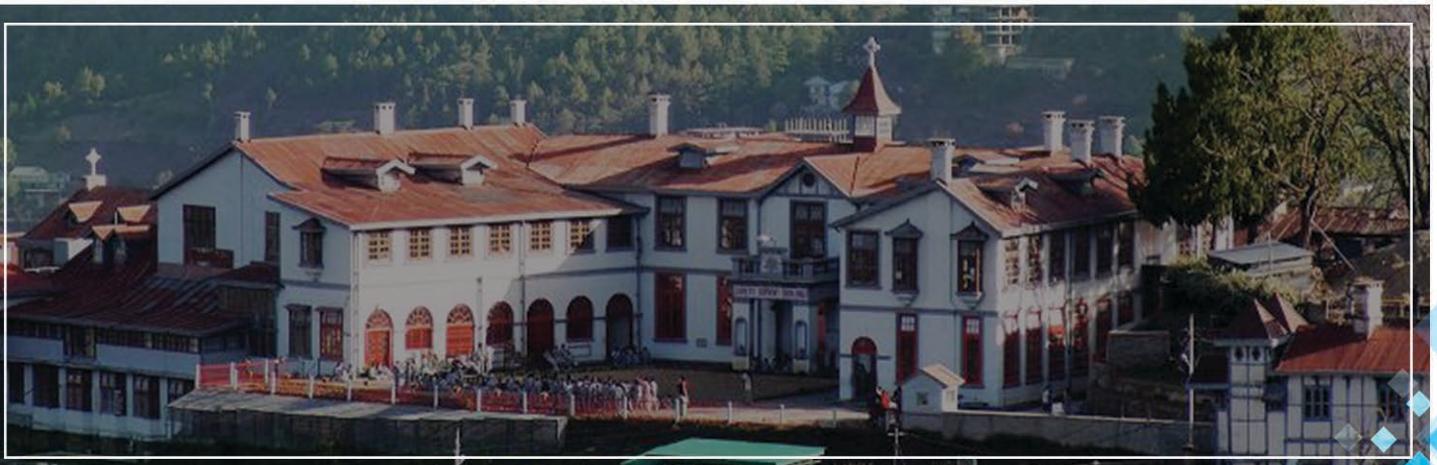
- The Child Protection Officer coordinates the task of protection and must at all times act in close coordination and collaboration with the Principal of the Institution.
- The Child Protection Officer must be a good listener with the ability to empathise, keep confidence and be objective, while being generally friendly and approachable
- The Child Protection officer must ensure that the Child Protection Policy is adhered to at all levels within the Institution, and that any breach of the policy is immediately reported and dealt with. To this end, the Child Protection Officer is empowered to either speak to the Principal of the Institution, and in extreme situations where so justified, to the Secretary of the Managing Committee to ensure compliance;
- The Child Protection Officer's first and foremost priority is always the safety, protection and security of all children in the Institution.
- The responsibilities of the Child Protection Officer acting within the four walls of this policy include:

- ▶ Report of breach of policy;
- ▶ Availability at all times to students and staff;
- ▶ Encouraging individuals to disclose or report any allegations;
- ▶ Compliance with procedural elements on reporting allegations, especially those of a sexual nature;
- ▶ Protection, care and attention for all concerned in an incident of abuse;
- ▶ Maintenance of confidentiality of all reports and information relating to allegations of any sort;
- ▶ Ensuring professional care and treatment of children, staff or anyone who requires it;
- ▶ Discretion to close the matter if so justified with or without the concurrence of the Committee members, provided that a report be filed with the Committee at its next meeting in this regard;

PROCEDURES FOR DEALING WITH COMPLAINTS

Guidelines for Staff Members

- ✓ Any staff member coming to know about any incidents involving children are duty bound to report it to any of the Contact Persons or Child Protection Officers
- ✓ **All staff members are to sign the copy of this policy** that they are aware of the content of the Child Protection Policy and will respect and abide by it in all forms, and understand the consequences thereof.
- ✓ Staff members must at all times behave appropriately and be responsible for all interactions with students and children, even in the face of provocative behaviour, and must at all times remember that they are role models for their charges.
- ✓ Any staff member who behaves inappropriately in any manner with children or disregards the Child Protection Policy will be appropriately dealt with in a proportional response – a criminal offence will be reported to the police, internal disciplinary violations will be dealt with by the Institution, necessary disciplinary actions including dismissal will be applied as appropriate.
- ✓ All staff members must ensure that their perception and appearance are above reproach and set the highest standards of behaviour, discipline and appearance for their charges.
- ✓ All staff members must cooperate fully and maintain total confidentiality in any matter relating to concerns or allegations or enquiry into incidents relating to the children.
- ✓ No staff members should go outside the Institutional mechanisms to air grievances, disputes or to disclose confidential information relating to the children under their care. Any staff member, who wishes to do so, can also approach the Child Protection Committee for appropriate guidance, intervention and/or corrective measures.



Procedure for dealing with Complaints of Abuse:

These procedures are laid out for due compliance in all cases involving complaints of any kind whatsoever. In situations that require further escalation, the same is to be appropriately considered, while in situations that disclose commission of an offence under the law as understood, immediate steps are to be taken in compliance with the legal systems in force, as detailed hereunder. These steps are given in procedural sequence and must be so followed as far as possible.



RECEIPT OF COMPLAINT

Any person connected with an institution, whether a child, parent, guardian or staff member of any description, may register a complaint in the Standard Reporting Form to any authority of the School, or to the members of the Child Protection Committee, including Child Protection Officers or Contact Persons in any regard without any fear or favour.

On receipt of an oral complaint, the same shall be reduced to writing. Thereafter, the written complaint shall be verified to contain the date of the incident, the time of the incident, the details of the victim and of the offender, a brief account of the incident including frequency and circumstances.

Under no circumstances should the complainant feel intimidated or threatened, or that any attempt is being made to dissuade a complainant from proceeding with a complaint.

If the complainant is a child, the person receiving the report shall immediately ask the child if he/she wishes her parents to be informed or called, or the Child Protection Officers to be informed or called. Whatever is comfortable for the child must be done initially at the time of reporting, but at the second instance, parents of the child must be informed and asked to be present.

The complaint should be signed by the complainant. If the complainant wishes not to do so, no coercion should be used; rather the complainant should be assured of fullest confidence. In a last resort, the Contact Person who is receiving the complaint may disclose the identity of the complainant in the complaint along with a statement of refusal to sign.

The complaint should be verified as to the *locus standi* of the complainant, i.e. the person making it should be a genuine person, such as a student, parent, guardian, family member, or third person who has genuine interest and/or care, or staff member.

The Standard Reporting Form is to be immediately filled out by the person receiving the complaint, with all particulars mentioned as denoted in the form. Any assistance in this regard may be sought immediately from available Child Protection Officers or Contact Persons of the Child Protection Committee of the Institution.

All available materials relating to the complaint should be immediately collected from the complainant party, including materials which corroborate the allegations including but not limited to photographs, videos, SMS, emails, material objects etc. All the accompanying materials must be covered in the Reporting Form.

A copy of the Standard Reporting Form shall be immediately signed and finalised by the person receiving the report. Once the Standard Reporting Form has been filled out, the person taking the report shall immediately contact and hand over the same to the Child Protection Officers and/or Contact Persons of the Child Protection Committee.