



Approved: January 11, 2021

**Pacific Montessori Society
Child Abuse Reporting Policy**

POLICY STATEMENT

The Pacific Montessori Society expects all students, staff and other members of the Pacific Montessori Society to be treated with respect and courtesy, in accordance with the *Code of Conduct*.

The Pacific Montessori Society is committed to protection of students (children) from physical, emotional and verbal neglect and/or abuse, and sexual abuse. It is equally committed to protection of staff from victimization through false and/or unsubstantiated allegations or charges of child abuse.

POLICY RATIONALE

Under the *Child, Family and Community Service Act*, principals and teachers have a legal responsibility to report all suspected cases of abuse and/or neglect to a child protection social worker in the Ministry of Children and Family Development. This policy provides relevant procedures to follow.

The *Criminal Records Review Act* requires authorities covered by the *Independent School Act* to obtain criminal records check authorizations from non-teaching staff who work with children; teaching staff certified by the Inspector of Independent Schools; and those teachers who, although certified by the College of Teachers, are not currently members of the College.

At Selkirk Montessori School we value respect for each other. This allows students, staff and society members to feel safe, to develop a sense of belonging, to forge friendships with peers and maintain respectful relationships. With this sense of community, teaching and learning thrive.

SCOPE

The school is responsible for developing policy, procedures and programs that address all forms of harassment, bullying, discrimination, isolation and abuse.

This policy addresses abuse of one or more students by an adult, including staff or members of the Society. Sexual abuse of a student by another student is also covered.

For policy regarding harassment and bullying by students, staff and members of the Society see the *Harassment and Bullying Prevention and Management Policy*.

POLICY AND PROCEDURES

Our policy models a respectful environment that prevents child abuse from occurring and, in the event that it occurs, promotes healing and justice for the victim, and healing and accountability for the abuser.

I. Awareness

Through programs, staff shall help raise awareness of the *Code of Conduct* and how students can incorporate it in their daily behaviours.

There are many underlying causes of child abuse.

Child abuse can be blunt or subtle and may continue undetected by anyone other than the victim.

Through programs, staff shall help raise awareness of what child abuse is and what can be done to prevent it.

II. Prevention

Our staff are leaders who nurture and model a school climate that fosters community, prevents child abuse, and works for forgiveness, healing and reconciliation when it occurs.

Staff shall make students aware that they can safely (and confidentially) communicate complaints about child abuse (and any other matter) to staff.

All staff must undergo a criminal record check as a condition of employment.

Upon request from the Inspector of Independent Schools, the Society must make available to the Inspector, or the Inspector's designate, any information or records pertaining to an individual under review that is necessary for conducting a criminal records review.

III. Intervention

Reporting

Staff must report any evidence of child abuse that comes to their attention to the Appointed School Official (Head of School) or the Alternate Appointed School Officials (Executive Director and Special Education Coordinator) and to a child protection social worker in the Ministry of Children and Family Development. If the child is enrolled in the licensed programs (preschool/kindergarten/out of school care), the school's licensing officer should be contacted within 24 hours. If the Head of School is the subject of the alleged child abuse, staff must advise the Board of Directors of the Pacific Montessori Society.

In addition to making a verbal report, staff must document the allegation in a written report to ensure complete and accurate information is shared with child abuse investigators.

The written report shall be submitted to the Board.

The Head of School or their delegate shall advise the Inspector of Independent Schools when an employee of an independent school is reported for alleged child abuse. If the Head of School is the subject of the alleged child abuse, the Board shall advise the Inspector.

If a decision made by the Society as a result of a child abuse allegation involves any disciplinary measures against a teacher, those disciplinary measures shall be reported to the Teacher Regulation Branch

All actions taken shall be documented, including names, times and methods of communication, and a copy retained in the administrative files.

Confidentiality

The records of all informal and written complaints, and all information and documentation gathered or produced during, or as a result of, complaints shall be considered confidential by the parties and the Society, except as required by law. The Society may use such information and documentation as required to protect the interests of the general school community with respect to both the subject complaint and in future matters.

The identity of a staff who has reported suspected child abuse shall not be revealed, except as required by law.

Should the identity of a staff who has reported suspected child abuse become known to the alleged abuser, the Board shall support the reporting staff by:

- a) Notifying police and Ministry for Children and Family Development, if the alleged abuser harasses or threatens the reporting staff.
- b) Notifying the abuser that the Board considers the reporting staff to have acted according to her/his legal responsibility and that the Board supports the actions of the staff.

Involvement of Other Agencies

The Society shall cooperate with the Ministry of Children and Family Development, the RCMP, and local police in investigating charges of child abuse.

Dismissal of Staff

If it is demonstrated to the satisfaction of the Board that a staff has been abusive and/or inappropriately involved including, but not specifically restricted to, sexual involvement with a child or children of school age, the Board will consider such conduct a fundamental breach of the staff's duties and obligations and may dismiss the staff.

Discipline of Students

If a student is found to have sexually abused another student, the Head of School or their delegate shall take the following action:

- Notify the students and their parents/caregivers, and the Board that action has been taken.
- Notify the appropriate authorities.
- Ensure that a formal plan is prepared to address healing for the victim and accountability for the abuser. The plan shall include specific accountabilities for monitoring and follow-up, and may include serious disciplinary action. See *Discipline Policy*. For purposes of the *Discipline Policy*, interventions under the *Child Protection Policy* are considered to be a Stage 3 intervention.
- Ensure that all steps in the plan are implemented in a timely manner.
- Document a summary of these events, including names, times and methods of communication, and retain a copy in the administrative files.

IV. Process and Timelines

To enable timely responses to issues as they arise, the Head of School may delegate his/her authority under this policy for periods when they are unavailable.

Time is of the essence in dealing with child abuse, since the victim may continue to be subject to abuse while the interventions and planning are under way.

All initial responses shall be undertaken without delay, and where required, a plan shall be completed in 5-10 working days.

V. Appeals

Parties involved may consult the *Complaints and Appeals Policy*.

DEFINITIONS

The following definitions are intended to enhance understanding of this policy. They are descriptive only and not intended to be used for any legal actions.

Bullying

“Bullying...is a pattern of repeated aggressive behaviour, with negative intent, directed from one child to another where there is a power imbalance.” (The most widely accepted definition from the work of leading Norwegian researcher, Dr, Dan Olweus)

Child

Any person under 19 years of age.

Child abuse

As defined in the *Inter-Ministry Child Abuse Handbook*, child abuse includes physical, emotional and verbal neglect and/or abuse and sexual abuse.

Criminal records check

A check covered by the *Criminal Records Review Act* (CRRA) and conducted by the CRRA office. Individuals working with children must have had a CRRA check unless exempted under s.3 of the CRRA.

Discrimination

An action or a decision that treats a person or a group negatively for reasons such as their gender, race, culture, religion, sexual orientation or gender identity and expression, physical or mental disability or for any other reason set out in the Human Rights Code of British Columbia

Emotional and verbal abuse

A pattern of destructive behaviours or verbal attacks by an adult on a child. Typical behaviours may include rejecting, terrorizing, ignoring, isolating, humiliating, insulting, scapegoating, exploiting or corrupting a child.

Neglect

The failure of those responsible for the care of the child to meet the physical, emotional or medical needs of a child to an extent that the child's health, development or safety is endangered.

Physical abuse

Any deliberate physical assault or action which results in, or may result in, a non-accidental injury to a child, and which exceeds that which could be considered reasonable discipline.

Relevant criminal offence

The *Criminal Records Review Act* designates which offences are relevant to the protection of children. Only offences associated with physical or sexual abuse, as listed in the *Act*, Schedule 1, are considered. This includes indecent acts and violence. It does not include offences that are not relevant to the protection of children.

Sexual abuse

Any sexual exploitation of a child whether consensual or not. It includes touching of a sexual nature and sexual intercourse, and may include any behaviour of a sexual nature toward a child, such as, menacing or threatening sexual acts; deliberate exposure of a child to sexual activity or material; and permitting, encouraging or requiring a child to engage in conduct of a sexual nature for stimulation, gratification, or self-interest of another person.

In determining whether behaviour is of a sexual nature, one should ask whether a reasonable observer, looking at the behaviour in its context, would conclude that it is. This would exclude normal affectionate behaviour towards children and normal health or hygiene care.

Sexual activity between children may constitute sexual abuse if the difference in age or power between the children is so significant that the other or more powerful child is clearly taking sexual advantage of the younger or less powerful child. This would exclude consensual, developmentally appropriate sexual activity between children where there is not significant difference in age or power between the children.

Staff

Any individual who is employed by the Pacific Montessori Society, including an independent contractor who has entered into an agreement with the Society.

Work with children

Working with children directly, or having, or potentially having unsupervised access to children in the ordinary course of employment or in the practice of an occupation.

REFERENCES

Child, Family and Community Service Act

British Columbia Human Rights Code

Criminal Records Review Act

Independent School Act

Independent School Regulation

Society Act

British Columbia Handbook for Action on Child Abuse and Neglect (June 2017)

Inter-Ministry Child Abuse Handbook (revised 1988) (Crown Publications, Victoria, BC)

Supporting Our Students: A Guide for Independent School Personnel Responding to Child Abuse

Harassment and Bullying Prevention and Management Policy

Code of Conduct

Complaints and Appeals Policy

Discipline Policy