



**AMERICAN SCHOOL OF TEGUCIGALPA  
CHILD PROTECTION POLICIES  
REVISED DECEMBER 2020**

## Child Protection Policy for the American School of Tegucigalpa (AST)

### **1. Introduction**

In congruence with the AST [Mission & Vision Statements](#), AST ensures a safe and nurturing environment for all children that fosters the learning and development of the whole child. This includes practices and policies which protect the individual rights of each student.

Schools fill a special institutional role in society as protectors of children. As such, all children in their care are afforded a safe and secure environment in which to grow and develop, both at school and away. Educators, having the opportunity to observe and interact with children over time, are in a unique position to identify children who may be in need of help and protection. For this reason, educators have a professional and ethical commitment to identify children who may be in need of assistance and safeguarding, and obligated to take the necessary steps to ensure that the child and family avail themselves of the services needed to remedy any situation that constitutes child abuse or neglect.

Child abuse and neglect are violations of the laws of the Republic of Honduras as well as the [UN Convention on the rights of the Child](#), of which Honduras is a signatory as well as applicable Honduran legislation such as, but not limited to, “Código de la Niñez y la Adolescencia”. ([Additional Honduran National Legislation: as of 2019](#))

#### ***Article 19 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child:***

1. States Parties shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child.
2. Such protective measures should, as appropriate, include effective procedures for the establishment of social programmes to provide necessary support for the child and for those who have the care of the child, as well as for other forms of prevention and for identification, reporting, referral, investigation, treatment and follow-up of instances of child maltreatment described heretofore, and, as appropriate, for judicial involvement.

Violations of a child’s human rights may be obstacles to the child’s education as well as to their physical, social and emotional development. In congruence with these laws and aligned with standards and practices derived by similar schools, The American School of Tegucigalpa (AST) has developed and adopted a policy to serve as guidance to protect our children from possible violations and provide them with a safe environment for learning and growing.

This AST Child Protection Policy addresses all types of human interactions; child to child, adult to child, child to adult, and adult to adult. The policy applies to all students, staff, faculty,

after-hours staff, volunteers, and visitors to The American School of Tegucigalpa. The school will partner with parents to promote an ambiance of trust, where students understand their rights and responsibilities to themselves and to each other, nourishing a caring and supportive learning community.

## **2. Purpose. This child protection policy aims to:**

- Ensure consistency and equal access to education for all students regardless of age, gender identity, ability, religion, nationality, etc. and compliance with national laws and statutory guidance related to child safety.
- Provide clear expectations about child safety and the school's response to concerns or allegations of harm.
- Establish responsibility of all adults to protect children and the rights of children enrolled in the American School of Tegucigalpa and impacted by the operations of the American School of Tegucigalpa to be free from harm.
- Establish clear recruitment and hiring expectations to enable diligent screening and selection of staff, faculty, volunteers, partners, and other American School of Tegucigalpa identified trusted adults.
- Outline continued professional development for staff, student prevention education and parent/caregiver support around child protection prevention of harm and response to harm if it occurs.
- Support continued communication and shared understanding about childhood abuse definitions, signs and indicators, and response when risk of harm is evident, or harm occurs.
- Establish that the American School of Tegucigalpa prioritizes the wellbeing of students and acknowledges that children cannot consent to abuse.
- American School of Tegucigalpa staff and Board members are accountable to this policy which is linked to American School of Tegucigalpa protocols on strategic planning, budgeting, recruitment, performance management, external partnerships, risk management, etc.
- Policy will be cited including school website, parent and staff handbooks, and staff employment procedures. Child Protection Policies will be referenced in Board approved locations.

## **3. Roles and responsibilities**

1. Child Protection Policies apply to various stakeholders and their roles are broadly described herein. The listed responsibilities give clarity to the roles and responsibilities of different stakeholders but should not be viewed as entirely exhaustive.  
*including employment procedures including background and reference checks, code of professional conduct, grounds for dismissal, induction, and annual training*
  - a. Students
    - i. Students must be aware of different reporting pathways and aid in reporting incidents that reach a threshold of concern.
  - b. Faculty (teachers, counselors, assistants, coaches, secretaries, custodial, drivers, etc)

- i. All faculty must be aware of different reporting pathways and report incidents that would reach the threshold of reporting.
- c. Senior leaders
  - i. Senior administrative leaders must collaborate with the child protection designate in implementing annual policy reviews and the induction of new staff.
  - ii. Senior administrative leaders will advocate for the participation of key members in their Division for the Child Response Team and a Child Protection Policy Committee as necessary.
  - iii. Senior administrative leaders will participate in the appointment and evaluation of the Child Protection designate.
  - iv. Senior administrative leaders will engage in safe hiring practices by checking previous employment references, background checks, asking specific child protective questions, etc, as defined by the safer hiring policy.
  - v. Senior leaders will be responsible for ensuring staff and volunteers uphold this policy and its proxies, taking disciplinary measures when necessary.
- d. Child protection designate and deputy
  - i. Name(s) and contact information
  - ii. The Child Protection designate (and/or the deputy) is/are responsible for leading the annual review of policies prior to the academic start of the subsequent school year
    - 1. Depending on the scope of policy review, this may be tasked to the Child Response Team or call for an assembly of a Child Protection Policy Committee.
  - iii. The Child Protection designate (and/or the deputy) is/are responsible for their own self directed professional development regarding Child Protection.
  - iv. The Child Protection designate (and/or the deputy) is responsible for programming the calendar of monthly meetings, writing/facilitating the agenda, and introducing the case studies that the Child Response Team will review.
  - v. The Child Protection designate (and/or the deputy) is responsible for familiarizing new staff members with the policies and leading or planning any necessary workshops as a part of induction.
    - 1. The designate (and/or deputy) must keep a record of staff participation in inductions and further development training.
- e. Governing Board
  - i. The board will allocate fiscal resources as necessary to promote the execution of these policies.
- f. Parents
  - i. Parents must be aware of different reporting pathways and aid in reporting incidents that reach a threshold of concern.

#### **4. Definitions, signs and indicators of abuse to include emotional/psychological, physical and sexual abuse and neglect.**

What is child abuse?

**Child abuse is child harm.** This includes harming a child or causing a child to be harmed, putting a child at risk of harm, attempting to harm a child, or inciting another to harm a child.

Child abuse includes sexual abuse, emotional abuse, physical abuse and neglect.

**Sexual Abuse: Any sexual act involving a child or experienced by a child, with or without contact. Sexual abuse may be committed by adults or another child who by age or development is in a relationship of responsibility, trust or power.\*** Sexual abuse includes but is not limited to the following actions: showing any type of sexual attention towards a child or flirting, exposing oneself to a child, inappropriate touching (appropriate touching includes consensual high fives, handshakes, fist bumps, or touching done by a medic or nurse to administer medical procedures), inappropriate language in person, via text or online (including giving inappropriate nicknames), hugging, stroking, kissing, excessive pressure to spend time or socialize outside of school, sending or sharing photos or videos of any sexual nature, or sexual behavior.

\*(As a point of clarity- sexual abuse is the term used to describe behavior towards children while sexual assault and sexual harassment are the terms used when the behavior is between adults)

#### **Sexual Abuse Signs and Indicators**

Behavioral Signs:

- Sexual knowledge, behavior, or use of language not appropriate to age level
- Keeping secrets or not talking as much
- Not wanting to be alone with certain people or afraid to be away from primary caregivers
- Unusual interpersonal relationship patterns
- Regressive behaviors or resuming behaviors they have grown out of, such as thumbsucking or bedwetting
- Attention deficits
- Evidence of physical trauma or bleeding in the oral, genital, or anal areas
- Difficulty in walking or sitting
- Refusing to change into PE clothes, fear of bathroom
- Trying to spend an unusual amount of time alone
- Pregnancy, especially at a young age
- Extremely protective parenting

Emotional signs:

- Change in eating habits

- Change in mood or personality, such as increased aggression
- Decrease in confidence or self-image
- Excessive worry or fearfulness
- Increase in unexplained health problems such as stomach aches and headaches
- Loss or decrease in interest in school, activities, and friends
- Nightmares or fear of being alone at night
- Self-harming behaviors

**Physical abuse: Causing pain or an injury on purpose. Includes sustained physical activity and sustained physical restraint.**

Physical Abuse Indicators:

- Unplanned bruises and welts on softs parts of body
- Injuries in shape of an article (electrical cord, belt, hand, etc)
- Injuries that regularly appear after absence or vacation
- Unexplained burns, especially soles, palms, back or buttocks
- Burns with a pattern from a burner, iron, or cigarette
- Rope burns
- Injuries inconsistent with information offered by the child
- Immersion burns with a distinct boundary line
- Unexplained laceration, abrasions, or fractures
- Variations in explanations of events or over time
- History of prior suspicious injuries

**Emotional Abuse: Persistent harm to child's self-esteem, and emotional functioning. Includes insults, threats, belittling, fear, withholding of affection, and expectations beyond age or ability of the child.**

Emotional Abuse Indicators:

- Speech disorders
- Substance abuse
- Sucking, rocking, biting or head banging
- Antisocial or destructive behaviors
- Sleep disorders
- Passive aggressive behaviors

**Neglect: Failure to meet basic needs for love, shelter, education, healthcare, hygiene and supervision.**

Neglect Indicators:

- Child is dirty or hungry
- Low academic achievement
- Parents do not provide the recommended support/actions requested by the school
- Child does not want to go home
- Depression
- Both parents or legal guardians are absent from their city of residence for any period of 24 hours or greater, without appropriate provision made for the child's care, and a temporary guardian is named
- Parents cannot be reached in case of emergency

What is Grooming?

**Grooming Definition: The use of a variety of manipulative and controlling techniques; with a vulnerable subject; in order to establish trust or normalize sexually harmful behavior; with the overall aim of facilitating exploitation and prohibiting discovery.**

Grooming happens with the child but also can happen with the family or within the institution, sometimes called "institutional grooming."

**Phase 1 Building trust and gaining access to child** (ex: gift giving or favor granting; adapting an environment to make behavior seem normal; chopping down natural barriers)

**Phase 2 Initiate & maintain abuse** (ex: normalizing boundary crossing in incremental steps verbally, physically, or behaviorally; progressive intimacy and limit testing; talking about sex and/or providing illicit experiences; creating emotional interdependence or inappropriately extending relationships beyond role)

**Phase 3 Conceal abuse & prevent detection** (secrets, threats, blackmail; meeting parents needs or alienating child from parents; making the child they consented to abuse)

**Signs of Institutional Grooming:**

- Too trusted within the community to question or person is an exception to rules
- Establishing a context to interpret actions or conceal true motivation
- Routine pushing/crossing boundaries and rules
- Resetting institutional norms for 'convenience or practicality,' seeking roles where supervision is weak and situational access is high
- Undermining the authority of others
- Responding with outrage, threats, intimidation and other unprofessional conduct
- Resists correction

## **5. Reporting pathways for the American School of Tegucigalpa community**

- The AST CHILD PROTECTION REPORTING FORM should be made available online. Community members who have access to the school App or Intranet would be able to submit an online report. Also, there can be options of where the form would be sent:
  - - CPD (Child Protection Designate)

- Division Counselors
- Division Principals
- Superintendent
- If desiring to submit the report anonymously, one may create an email address unassociated to one's self and send the report to any of the aforementioned contacts.

## **6. Protocol for Addressing a Concern, an Allegation, and a Missing Child**

### Administrative Leave and Disciplinary Actions:

Administrative leave and ensuing disciplinary action shall fall under the purview of the Head of School upon his/her formal presentation of the matter to the school Board.

### Internal Inquiry and Case Evaluation:

1. The response to a crisis shall be managed by established teams [Crisis Team, Child Protection Response Team (CPT)]
2. The Child Protection Response Team Process is as Follows:
  - A. Step 1: Initial Case Assessment
  - B. Step 2: Information Gathering and Assessment
  - C. Step 3: Structured Judgment Process
  - D. Step 4: Recommendation to Decision Maker(s)

### Risk Mitigation and Safety Planning for Students:

At all times the physical, emotional, and psychological safety of students will be the primary and outstanding concern of the institution. Confidentiality will be maintained and physical distancing must immediately be put into effect between the victim and the offender. The offender is to be told not to have contact of any type or at any time with the victim.

### External Reporting and External Partners and Local Agencies Who Become Involved in a Child Protection Matter:

Upon determination that a case is to be presented to an outside agency, said case should proceed as the country's laws dictate.

### Evaluation of Situational Risks and Mitigating Factors Such as: Shared Adult/Student Toilet Facilities or Spaces that Lack Visual and Auditory Supervision:

The institution will make certain to have separate toilet facilities for students and adults. Spaces that lack visual and auditory supervision will be locked when not in use.



## **7. Related policies or procedures**

1. Safer Hiring Policy- AST has rigorous recruitment procedures that ensure all employees are of sound moral character and are suitable people to work with children and young adults. Our school has aligned with the International Task Force for Child Protection checklist to guide our recruitment and screening practices for hiring.
2. Travel Policy- AST Travel Handbook Refers to policies and practices to safeguard the physical, emotional, social, and healthcare needs of students participating in field trips and exchanges. This section will also include legal requirements for travel.
3. Visitors, volunteers, tutors. Anyone entering AST must follow the security procedures. Reglamento de Seguridad AST
4. Photography Policy- Photo Release Form before photographing or filming a child, obtain consent from the child or a parent or guardian of the child. As part of this it must be explained how the photograph or film will be used.

## **8. Resources for staff and parents**

1. AST retains a list of psychologists, neurologists, psychiatrists which can be provided upon request by individual families.