

**CHILD ABUSE AND
PROTECTION POLICY**
Freedom Thinkers
Education
PBL Society

POLICY STATEMENT

The Society has a zero-tolerance stance on abuse and expects all students, staff, Board members, parents, volunteers and other members of Freedom Thinkers Education PBL Society to be treated with respect and courtesy, in accordance with the *Code of Conduct* at all times.

The Society is committed to protection of its school's learners (both students and staff) 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.

At Freedom Thinkers Education PBL Society 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, the opportunity for teaching and learning is optimized.

The safety and well-being of children is paramount.
Abuse Policies are reviewed with staff every year with a signed acknowledgement of the review.

POLICY AND PROCEDURES

Purpose

Our policy models a respectful environment that is intended to prevent possible 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

There are many underlying causes of child abuse.

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

II. Prevention

Our staff are leaders who nurture and model a school climate that fosters community, is intended to prevent child abuse, and supports healing in cases where such abuse occurs.

Staff shall make students aware that they can safely communicate complaints about child abuse and any other related matter to staff; however, must also explain to the students that it is their duty to report any suspected child abuse. The Child, Family and Community Service Act requires that anyone who has reason to believe that a child may be abused, neglected, or is for any other reason in need of protection, must report to MCFD (Ministry of Children and Family Development). Any reports should be made immediately to the ASO who will then report to the MCFD if needed.

III. Intervention

Reporting

The ASO must report any evidence of child abuse that comes to their attention to a Child Protection Social Worker in the Ministry of Children and Family Development.

In addition to making a verbal report, the ASO 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 MCFD and Board of Directors in a sealed envelope and the information not be available for others to read.

The ASO (Sandra Cushway) shall also advise the Inspector of Independent Schools if an employee of the school is reported for alleged child abuse. If the Principal is the subject of the alleged child abuse, the AASO will report to the Board of Directors and the Inspector.

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

All actions taken regarding these adults 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 identity of a staff member who has reported suspected child abuse shall not be revealed, except as required by law.

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

- a) Notifying police and Ministry for Children and Family Development, if the alleged abuser harasses or threatens the reporting staff member,
- b) Notifying the abuser that the Board considers the reporting staff member 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 member 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 Principal shall take the following action:

1. Notify the students and their parents/caregivers, and the Board that action will be taken.
2. Notify the appropriate authorities.
3. 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.
4. Ensure that all steps in the plan are implemented in a timely manner.
5. 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 Principal may delegate his/her authority under this policy to another teacher for periods when the Principal is 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 within ten (10) working days.

V. Appeals

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

Appointed Officials:

Appointed School Official (ASO) – Sandra Cushway (principal)

Alternate Appointed School Official (AASO) – Erica McNaughton (teacher)

Role of Appointed School Official (ASO):

The school principal (ASO) may be required to:

- investigate on behalf of the school authority
- ensure a safe school environment during investigations
- consult with the child welfare worker and/or police
- ensure that no school employee interferes with any investigations
- communicate with parents with respect to actions taken by the school authority
- report to the British Columbia College of Teachers and/or the Inspector of Independent Schools when the School Authority dismisses, suspends, or otherwise disciplines a certified teacher
- refer student(s) for counselling

Role of Alternate Appointed School Official (AASO):

In the event that a concern regarding abuse arises in regards to the ASO, the AASO will report the concern to the board.

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.

Child

Any person under 19 years of age.

Staff

Any individual who is employed by the Freedom Thinkers Education 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.

Abuse

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

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.

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.

Psychological Abuse

Defined as but not limited to communication of an abusive nature, sarcasm, exploitive behaviour, intimidation, manipulation, and insensitivity to race, sexual preference, or family dynamics.

Physical Abuse

Defined as but not limited to the use of intentional force that can result in physical harm or injury to an individual. It can take the form of slapping, hitting, punching, shaking, pulling, throwing, kicking, biting, choking, strangling or the abusive use of restraints.

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.

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.

Criminal records check

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

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.

Reference: *Child, Family and Community Service Act*

Policy Updated: December 2022