



# International School of the Sacred Heart Policy on Child Protection

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### Sacred Heart Goal IV.1

- The school, affirming that all are created in the image and likeness of God, promotes the inherent dignity of the human person and strives for relationships characterized by inclusion and mutual respect.

### Sacred Heart Goal IV.4

- All members of the school community support a clean, healthy and safe environment.

Dear Parents,

I am writing to inform you of a matter that is of sincere personal interest to me and one that I am sure is of utmost importance to all of you. Since August 2015 the International School of the Sacred Heart has adopted a Child Protection Policy to guide our faculty, staff and families in matters related to the health, safety and care of children in attendance at our school. In fact, I am required by this policy to send this letter to parents at the beginning of each school year. Thus with this letter not only am I fulfilling my assigned duties; I also have the opportunity to write to you about this important aspect of our school's program.

The International School of the Sacred Heart Child Protection Policy is based on international and local Japanese law and on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child of which Japan is a signatory. These two key articles from the U.N Convention on the Rights of the Child are important and we wish to draw your attention to them:

**Article 19 - Protection from abuse and neglect**

The State shall protect the child from all forms of maltreatment by parents or others responsible for the care of the child and establish appropriate social programs for the prevention of abuse and the treatment of victims.

**Article 34 - Sexual exploitation**

The State shall protect children from sexual exploitation and abuse, including prostitution and involvement in pornography.

By enrolling your child at the International School of the Sacred Heart, you agree to work in partnership with the school and abide by the policies adopted by the school. We genuinely value our partnership with you in providing for the safety and care of your children. It is for this reason that the International School of the Sacred Heart has endorsed a Child Protection Policy that defines the standards by which all our students should be treated with respect and dignity at all times.

As part of our overall educational programs and specific to our shared responsibility to educate children and to ensure a safe environment in which all children can learn and grow, the International School of the Sacred Heart will:

1. Provide age appropriate lessons for all grade levels to help students understand personal safety, needs and rights.
2. Provide parent materials and information sessions to help you better understand our programs and policy.
3. Annually train faculty and staff to recognize and report issues of abuse and neglect.

Working together at home and at school, we will ensure that our children are safe and are knowledgeable about their rights and responsibilities to themselves and to each other so they can grow and learn free of fear in a safe and supportive environment.

I thank you for your support of our efforts and if you have specific questions please contact the Principal or our School Health Officer, Meaghan Okutomi. Nurse Meaghan is our designated Child Protection Officer.

Sincerely,

Anne Wachter, RSCJ  
Head of School

## Child Protection Policy Statement

Child abuse and neglect are concerns throughout the world. Child abuse and neglect are violations of a child's human rights and are obstacles to the child's education as well as to their physical, emotional, and spiritual development. The International School of the Sacred Heart endorses the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, of which our host country, Japan, is a signatory.

The International School of the Sacred Heart promotes a safe and welcoming environment in which each person is valued, cared for and respected. Schools fill a special institutional role in society as protectors of children. Schools need to ensure that 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 are in need of help and protection. As such, educators have a professional and ethical obligation to identify children who are in need of help and protection, and 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.

All faculty, staff, and service providers employed at the International School of the Sacred Heart must report suspected incidents of child abuse or neglect whenever the faculty or staff member has reasonable cause to believe that a child has suffered, or is at significant risk of suffering abuse or neglect. Reporting and follow up of all suspected incidents of child abuse or neglect will proceed in accordance with administrative regulations respective to this policy. Furthermore, cases of suspected child abuse or neglect may be reported to the appropriate employer, to the respective consulate/embassy in Japan, to the appropriate child protection agency in the home country, and/or to local authorities. The report could also be passed on to the next school.

The International School of the Sacred Heart seeks to be a safe haven for students who may be experiencing abuse or neglect in any aspect of their lives. As such, the school will distribute this policy annually to all parents and applicants, will communicate this policy annually to students, will provide training for all faculty and staff, will make every effort to implement hiring practices to ensure the safety of children, and will review the policy annually for compliance and effectiveness. In the case of a faculty or staff member reported as an alleged offender, the International School of the Sacred Heart will conduct a full investigation following a carefully designed course of [due process](#), keeping the safety of the child at the highest priority.

## Definition of Terms

**Child Abuse** - According to the World Health Organization, child abuse constitutes “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.” A person may abuse a child by inflicting harm, or by failing to act to prevent harm.

**Physical abuse** may involve hitting, punching, shaking, throwing, poisoning, biting, burning or scalding, drowning, suffocating or otherwise causing intentional physical harm to a child.

### **Possible signs of physical abuse**

- Bruises, burns, sprains, dislocations, bites, cuts
- Improbable excuses given to explain injuries
- Injuries which have not received medical attention
- Injuries that occur to the body in places that are not normally exposed to falls, rough games, etc.
- Unexplained stomach pains
- Refusal to discuss injuries
- Withdrawal from physical contact
- Arms and legs kept covered in hot weather
- Fear of returning home or of parents being contacted
- Showing wariness or distrust of adults
- Self-destructive tendencies
- Being aggressive towards others
- Being very passive and compliant
- Chronic running away

**Emotional abuse** is the persistent emotional ill treatment of a child so as to cause severe and adverse effects on a child’s emotional development. It may involve: conveying to children that they are worthless or unloved; that they are inadequate or valued only insofar as they meet the needs of another person; age or developmentally inappropriate expectations or corruption of children. Some level of emotional abuse is involved in all types of ill-treatment of a child, though it may also occur alone.

### **Possible signs of emotional abuse**

- Physical, mental and emotional development is delayed
- Highly anxious
- Showing delayed speech or sudden speech disorder
- Fear of new situations
- Low self-esteem
- Inappropriate emotional responses to painful situations
- Extremes of passivity or aggression
- Drug or alcohol abuse
- Chronic running away

- Compulsive stealing
- Obsessions or phobias
- Sudden under-achievement or lack of concentration
- Attention-seeking behavior
- Persistent tiredness
- Lying

**Sexual abuse** involves forcing or enticing a child to take part in sexual activities, whether or not the child is aware of what is happening. The activities may involve physical contact, including penetrative (i.e. rape) or non-penetrative acts. They may include non-contact activities, such as involving children in the production or viewing of pornographic material or encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways. Children involved in commercial sex work are victims of sexual abuse, whether they perceive themselves as victims or not.

**Possible signs of sexual abuse**

- Pain or irritation to the genital area
- Vaginal or penile discharge
- Difficulty with urination
- Repeated urinary infections or
- Infection, bleeding
- STDs
- Fear of people or places
- Aggression
- Regressive behaviors, bed wetting or stranger anxiety
- Excessive masturbation
- Sexually provocative
- Stomach pains or discomfort walking or sitting
- Being unusually quiet and withdrawn or unusually aggressive
- Suffering from what seem physical ailments that cannot be explained medically
- Showing fear or distrust of a particular adult
- Mentioning receiving special attention from an adult or a new “secret” friendship with an adult or young person
- Refusal to continue with school or usual social activities
- Age inappropriate sexualized behavior or language

**Neglect** is the persistent failure to meet a child’s basic physical or physiological needs, likely to result in serious impairment of the child’s health or development.

**Some possible indicators of neglect**

- Medical needs unattended
- Lack of supervision
- Consistent hunger
- Inappropriate dress
- Inadequate nutrition
- Fatigue or listlessness
- Self-destructive behaviour

- Extreme loneliness
- Extreme need for affection
- Failure to grow
- Poor personal hygiene
- Frequent lateness or non-attendance at school
- Low self-esteem
- Poor social relationships
- Compulsive stealing
- Drug or alcohol abuse

## **Commonly held myths vs the realities about child abuse and neglect**

- **Myth:** Child abuse is carried out by strangers. **Fact:** Research indicates that 90% of abuse is committed by individuals known to the child. International school communities tend to have families that move often and are separated from their extended families in their home-of-record. When abuse is within the family, the transient lifestyle then increases the risk to international school students who tend not to have access to outside resources, and therefore cannot get help.
- **Myth:** Learning about child protection is harmful to your children. **Fact:** Research indicates that developmentally appropriate education makes children more confident and able to react to dangerous situations. Teaching using a specific population context increases protective behavior.
- **Myth:** Abuse education is sex education. **Fact:** Research-based programs prepare students to develop the skills and attitudes to keep themselves safe from perpetrators, and behaviors that include bullying, harassment and other forms of exploitation.
- **Myth:** Abuse is a matter of culture; physical or sexual abuse falls within the norms of some cultures and is acceptable. **Fact:** The reality is that there no excuse for child abuse! No culture supports harming children.
- **Myth:** Child abuse is a result of poverty and happens in low socioeconomic circumstances. **Fact:** Research indicates that child abuse occurs in all racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, and cultural sectors of society. A common characteristic of an abusive family is isolation, such as that commonly found in our international school families who move often or are separated from their extended families at home.
- **Myth:** International schools do not have to report abuse to local authorities. **Fact:** International schools are bound by the laws of the host country and as such international schools must be knowledgeable and compliant with the child protection laws in their locale. Furthermore, international schools are legally and ethically liable for any violation of existing laws related to reporting of cases of abuse or neglect.

On the first day of a new school year, all Faculty and Staff must sign the following Child Protection Code of Conduct as a commitment to our Child Protection Policy and Procedures.

## **Statement of Acknowledgement of Child Protection Code of Conduct for Faculty and Staff**

I promise to strictly follow the rules and guidelines in this Child Protection Code of Conduct as a condition of my providing services to the students participating in the International School of the Sacred Heart programs.

I will:

- Treat everyone with respect, patience, integrity, courtesy, dignity, and consideration.
- Use positive reinforcement rather than criticism, inappropriate competition, or comparison when working with students.
- Maintain appropriate physical boundaries at all times and touch students – when necessary – only in ways that are appropriate, public, and non-sexual.
- Report to the Child Protection Officer should a student make inappropriate advances.
- Comply with the International School of the Sacred Heart Child Protection Policy to report suspected child abuse to the Child Protection Officer.
- Cooperate fully in any investigation of abuse of students.
- Ensure the glass window on the classroom/office/lab door is unobstructed.
- Only consume alcohol in moderation at school events such as Family Festival, Bingo etc.
- Notify a parent or colleague if it becomes necessary to be alone with a student during off-campus school activities such as excursions.
- Notify the After School and Summer Programs Coordinator of any before or after-school scheduled tutoring on campus.
- Inform the Child Protection Officer if a guest is invited to work with students as part of the curricular or extra-curricular programs.
- Inform the Child Protection Officer if a teacher, coach, or other service provider organizes for students to meet with them on weekends or holidays.

I will not:

- Inflict any physical or emotional abuse of students such as striking, spanking, shaking, slapping, humiliation, ridiculing, threatening, or degrading.
- Touch or speak to a student in a sexual or other inappropriate manner.
- Reveal personal information about my own sex life.
- Accompany a student off-campus alone without parental consent.
- Accept gifts from or give gifts to students without the knowledge of their parents or guardians.
- Engage in private communications with students via text messaging, email, Facebook, X, Instagram, TikTok, or similar forms of electronic or social media, except for activities strictly involving school business.

- Use profanity or other language that is contextually inappropriate, culturally insensitive, or offensive in reference to race, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and cognitive or physical abilities.
- Use the designated students' bathrooms while students are in the school.
- Smoke or use tobacco products around students.
- Possess, or be under the influence of, illegal drugs at any time while in Japan.
- Download or watch pornography on school equipment or on the school premises.
- Take photographs of students in swimsuits.
- Store photographs of students on a personal device.

I understand that as a person working with and/or providing services to students under the auspices of the International School of the Sacred Heart, I am subject to a background check. My signature confirms that I have read this Child Protection Code of Conduct and that as a person working with children and youth, I agree to follow these standards. I understand that any action inconsistent with this Child Protection Code of Conduct or failure to take action mandated by this Child Protection Code of Conduct may result in disciplinary action up to and including removal from the International School of the Sacred Heart.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

*By following the points above, you are also helping to protect yourself from allegations of improper behavior. It is always the adult's responsibility to set and respect boundaries. If a student attempts to involve an adult in inappropriate behavior, the adult must reject the overture and report it to the Child Protection Officer.*

**This Child Protection Code of Conduct also applies to all after-school activity providers, and outside service providers including but not limited to summer school teachers and assistants, Secom guards, Cezars Kitchen, IVYCS cleaning company and Shuwa company. The Business Manager is responsible for collecting the signed agreements from these service providers. The International School of the Sacred Heart keeps the original document on file and a copy is given to the activity provider.**



# Responding to Suspected Child Abuse

## Take action when...

- A child discloses to you information indicating abuse or neglect.
- A child has non-accidental injuries or an explanation that is inconsistent with the injuries that lead you to suspect abuse.
- A third person discloses information that gives you reason to believe abuse or neglect has occurred.

**If a child reports abuse to you, or if you see unexplained injuries on a child: ask these four questions to ascertain what occurred. You are not responsible for investigating.**

- What happened?
- Who did this to you?
- Where were you when this happened?
- When did this happen?

Where there is cause to suspect child abuse or neglect, it is the responsibility of the faculty, staff, or other service provider to report their suspicions to the Child Protection Officer. It is the responsibility of the Child Protection Officer to activate the response team to deal with suspected cases of child abuse or neglect.

**All school personnel are mandated to report incidences and suspicions of abuse and neglect to the Child Protection Officer.** All reports of abuse and neglect must be made to the Child Protection Officer **immediately or as soon as possible**. The response team will then work to plan the next steps.

## If a third party reports abuse to you

- If the third party is an adult, it is their obligation to report the suspicion to the authorities.
- If the third party is another child, refer them to the Child Protection Officer.

## Immunity for reporters

- Obligation to report child abuse overrides non-disclosure agreement.
- In Japan, any person who reports in good faith is immune from any civil or criminal liability for reporting.

## **What happens after suspected abuse or neglect is reported?**

The Child Protection Officer activates the response team. This may consist of:

- The Principal
- Student Health Officer
- Personal Counsellor
- Teacher to whom the initial report was made
- Homeroom Teacher

The response team will gather further information and decide on the best course of action. This could include:

- Providing support for child and family within the school
- Family meeting
- Outside referral for support and/or counselling
- Reporting to outside authorities
- Contacting Consulate/Embassy
- Contacting employer

In the case of a report of historic abuse at International School of the Sacred Heart, the school will take the report seriously and conduct a thorough and prompt investigation.

### **Documentation of reported or disclosed cases of abuse**

All suspected or reported cases of abuse or neglect will be documented by the school and confidentially stored. Information may be shared within the professional community as necessary.

Child protection follows the child, especially when the problem is within the family; thus we are morally obligated to do as much as we can to help the next community protect the child/youth. This may include making contact with the next school.

### **What if the suspected offender works for the school?**

When a child discloses about inappropriate behaviors of school personnel, the school will respond no differently than if the alleged offender is a family member. All allegations will be taken seriously and investigated. The International School of the Sacred Heart will initiate an investigation in cooperation with relevant authorities following a carefully designed course of due process as detailed below, keeping the safety of the child at the highest priority. Depending on the severity of the allegation, the incident may be dealt with internally or referred to outside authorities. The safety of our students is paramount in this situation.

The following actions will be taken in the event of an allegation:

- The school will investigate the incident immediately.
- The school will inform the child's parents immediately.

- Depending on severity of the allegation, the teacher or employee may be placed on leave while further investigations are taking place.

If the allegation is found to be false, the school will offer support and counselling to the accused. If found to be true, the matter will be dealt with by the authorities.

### **Due Process**

(Notes of all meetings are recorded)

1. Case is reported. Determination made of any immediate/urgent needs of the student.
2. Response team activated to identify which individuals need to be contacted for the collection of information.
3. Determine further needs of the reporter such as meeting with a counsellor, contact parents, etc.
4. Preliminary investigation begins by meeting with relevant individuals and the accused.
5. The school will respect confidentiality as much as possible consistent with the necessity to investigate allegations fully.
6. Decision made for next steps. (May include one or more of the steps below)
  - Accused asked to stay away from campus until further notice
  - Contact school's child protection lawyer for recommendations on how to proceed, considering the rights of both the accused and the reporter.
  - Report made to police/authorities

Further course of action will be determined by the nature and seriousness of the allegations. If the allegations made are considered by the response team to most likely be true one or more of the following may take place.

- Accused is officially warned and the warning placed in their official file.
- Accused is dismissed from employment at International School of the Sacred Heart
- Accused is reported to the police and suspended from duties until the police have conducted their investigation. The final outcome in terms of employment will be determined by the outcome of the police investigation.

Every effort will be made to fully investigate allegations and the school requests the full cooperation of all parties in doing so. If it is impossible to determine whether the allegations are true, the school will make the final determination and decisions for further courses of action, based upon the evidence collected.

### **Screening of Personnel**

The first and most effective means of preventing child abuse is screening out potential abusers before they come to the school. It is a reasonable expectation that all young people who come on to our campus will be afforded the same protection that we provide to our students.

All International School of the Sacred Heart personnel, staff, faculty and coaches whose potential employment involves direct contact with, and/or the potential for unmonitored access to children, are given thorough reference and background checks, including review of criminal and sexual offender records. It is a requirement that outside service providers (including security guards, catering and cleaning companies and other activity providers) will sign an agreement as part of their contract with the school, confirming that they will inform their employees of our policies and ensure compliance.

International School of the Sacred Heart reserves the right to conduct background screening of employees at any time after employment has begun. Any misrepresentations, falsifications, or material omissions in the information provided, whenever discovered, may result in termination of employment with the organization.

## **Curriculum**

The International School of the Sacred Heart will provide a K-12, developmentally appropriate personal safety programme as part of the curriculum. Personal education and K-6 homeroom teachers will be trained to deliver this programme and all parents and school personnel will be informed of the content.

## **Peer on Peer Abuse: Use Your Power for Good**

### **Our Beliefs:**

- Peer on Peer Abuse is a form of bullying. (See Positive Peer Relations policy)
- The school actively seeks to raise awareness of and prevent all forms of peer on peer abuse.
- Relational aggression prevention cannot be taught in a lecture: each student has to feel it, reflect on it, participate in activities, read true stories and case studies.
- Making girls feel personally responsible is the most important thing we can teach.
- To be unkind is learnt behaviour that we can unlearn.
- It is cool to be strong and defend others.
- Behavior takes place on a spectrum: Understanding where a child 's behaviour falls on a spectrum is essential to being able to respond appropriately to it.

### **Definition of Relational Aggression:**

**Relational aggression** is defined as a type of aggression that is "intended to harm others through deliberate manipulation of their social standing and relationships". This includes behavior directed towards harming or destroying another's friendships, isolating others from a peer group and social ostracizing or rejection. Examples are spreading rumors, gossiping (privately and publicly), overt and/or subtle exclusive behaviors, intentionally cruel body language and/or facial gestures, and teasing (particularly about one's physical appearance).

### **Examples of Relational Aggression:**

- Spreading rumours
- Gossiping (privately and publicly)

- Overt and/or subtle exclusive behaviours
- Intentionally cruel language and/or facial gestures
- Teasing (particularly about one's physical appearance)
- Hurtful commenting on social media
- Sharing of potentially embarrassing pictures online without the permission of the subject of the picture. (Emphasis should not be on the person who took the picture of herself (often a victim) but on the wrongdoing of the person who shared the photo.)

#### **How can we safeguard our students:**

- Learn vocabulary: relational aggression, backstabbing, manipulation, gossip, exclusion
- Teach about hurtful behaviour and what leads to it: recognise that aggression is caused by fear and anger - what are healthy ways of channeling these feelings?
- Teach conflict resolution skills
- Teach about appropriate online behavior
- *Girl Wars: 12 Strategies That Will End Female Bullying* (resource)
  - Adopt a "help, don't hurt" strategy
  - Provide positive role models
  - Teach communication skills online and off
  - Stress assertiveness, not aggressiveness
  - Learn conflict resolution skills
  - Identify alternatives to bullying behavior
  - Teach empathy
- Teach about sexual abuse
- Train students in Active Bystander intervention
- Teach students to be upstanders, distractors, supporters

#### **How to identify a student who is being abused by her peers:**

*Note that abuse affects children very differently. Rather than checking behavior against a list, be alert to changes that might cause concern.*

- Disengagement from classes or struggling to carry out school related tasks to the standard ordinarily expected
- Failure to attend school
- Physical injuries
- Experiencing difficulties with mental health and/or emotional wellbeing
- Becoming withdrawn and or shy, experiencing headaches, stomach aches, anxiety or panic attacks, nightmares or difficulty/too much sleep
- Changes in appearance and/or starting to act in a non age-appropriate way
- Abusive behavior towards others

#### **Responding to concerns or allegations:**

- Thorough investigation
- Treat all children involved as potentially at risk

#### Resources

Odd Girl Out - Rachel Simmons

Queen Bees and Wannabees

Girl Wars - Cheryl Dellasega Ph.D. (Author), Charisse Nixon Ph.D. (Author)

Ophelia Project <https://www.opheliaproject.org/facts/DynamicsRA.pdf>

Peer on Peer Abuse Toolkit - Farrer and Co.

## Self-Harm

**Self-injury** is any deliberate, non-suicidal behaviour that inflicts physical harm on the body and is aimed at relieving emotional distress. It can include but is not limited to, cutting, burning, banging and bruising, non-suicidal overdose and even deliberate bone-breaking.

### **Risk factors associated with self-injury:**

- Low self-esteem
- Perfectionism
- Mental health issues such as depression and anxiety
- The onset of a more complicated mental illness such as schizophrenia, bi-polar disorder, or a personality disorder
- Problems at home or school
- Physical, emotional, or sexual abuse

### **Possible physical signs of self-injury:**

- Obvious cuts, scratches or burns that do not appear of an accidental nature
- Frequent 'accidents' that cause physical injury
- Regularly bandaged arms and/or wrists
- Reluctance to take part in physical exercise or other activities that require a change of clothes
- Wearing long sleeves and trousers even during hot weather

### **Self-Harm and Suicide:**

Although self-injury is non-suicidal behaviour and relied on as an attempt to cope and manage, it must be recognized that the emotional distress that leads to self-injury can also lead to suicidal thoughts and actions.

It is therefore of utmost importance that all incidents of self-injury are taken seriously and that the underlying issues and emotional distress are thoroughly investigated and necessary emotional support given, in order to minimize any greater risk.

### **What happens after self harm has been suspected or reported?**

If a student reports self-harm to a faculty or staff member:

- Faculty/staff listens in a kind, calm and non-judgemental manner.
- Faculty/staff should use "I" statements, e.g. "I am concerned about you," or "I am worried about you", or "I will help you find someone who can help you."

- Faculty/staff should not question the student about why she has harmed herself, or ask to see old wounds, or question the student about how she wounds herself.
- Faculty/staff explains to student that it is his/her responsibility to report student's behaviour to the Principal, Personal Counsellor, or Child Protection Officer to help the student receive support that is needed and keep student safe.
- Faculty/staff should accompany student to find the Principal, Personal Counsellor, Child Protection Officer, or find someone to bring one of these people to them.
- In the case of an acutely distressed student, the immediate safety of the student is paramount and an adult should remain with the student at all times.
- A student should be taken to the Student Health Office for medical treatment if she has open wounds and the instrument used to self-harm should be removed

If a report of self-harm has been made, the Principal, Personal Counsellor, or Child Protection Officer must activate the response team. This may consist of:

- The Principal
- Student Health Officer
- Personal Counsellor
- Teacher to whom the initial report was made
- Homeroom Teacher

The response team will gather further information and decide on the best course of action. This could include:

- Providing support for child and family within the school
- Provision of community and web-based resources to child and parents, for understanding and addressing self-injury.
- Family meeting
- Outside referral for support and/or counselling
- A request for the release of information to the school so that an appointed person may communicate with any outside professionals who are assisting the student.
- Reporting to outside authorities if parent refuses to act upon school's advice/recommendations

*Note: When determining a course of action, the student will be involved as an active participant in each step.*

The following will be made clear to a self-harming student:

- Self-injury is a way of coping with emotional pain, and therefore it is helpful to work with a counsellor to find other ways of coping.
- The student is asked not to self injure at school and not to openly display new or old wounds.
- The student should not talk graphically to other students about their injuries or describe methods used.

### **Self-harm Prevention:**

The school will educate students about signs of distress in themselves and others, as well as teaching about positive coping skills. Students will be educated that by seeking help and advice for a friend who is in distress, they are taking responsible action and being a good friend, and that their friend will be treated in a caring and supportive manner.

The peer group of a person who self-harms may value the opportunity to speak with the Personal Counsellor.

## **Suicide**

Suicide refers to the deliberate taking of one's life. Suicidal behaviour includes the spectrum of activities related to suicide, including suicidal thinking (ideation) and suicide attempts. Some people include risk-taking behaviours in which there is some risk of immediate or later self-harm (eg. self-harming, substance use).

International School of the Sacred Heart is committed to the creation of a school environment that helps to build protective factors within our students and school community that will reduce the risk of a student resorting to suicidal behaviour. This includes activities, policies and programs that help to build:

- Connectedness - a sense of belonging with others and connectedness to our school and community.
- Resilience - the development of capacities within a person that promote positive outcomes, including personal coping skills and strategies for dealing with adversity, such as problem-solving, communication and social skills, optimistic thinking and help seeking.
- A sense of personal safety - through the implementation of our Anti-Bullying Policy.

Students are taught that it is right to seek support for a friend that they fear may be at risk of suicide.

### **Suicide Ideation and Reports:**

The school will NOT ignore and will follow up immediately:

- Any student, parent or faculty "rumours" about a possible suicide attempt
- Any suicide notes/emails/messages communicated to peers, faculty and staff by students.

If a student verbally reports suicide ideation to a faculty or staff member:

- Faculty/staff listens in a kind, calm and non-judgemental manner.
- Faculty/staff should use "I" statements, e.g. "I am concerned about you," or "I am worried about you", or "I will help you find someone who can help you."
- Faculty/staff explains to student that it is his/her responsibility to report student's situation to the Principal, Personal Counsellor, or Child Protection Officer to help the student receive support that is needed and keep student safe
- The immediate safety of the student is paramount and an adult should remain with the student at all times
- Faculty/staff should accompany student to Principal, Personal Counsellor, or Child Protection Officer, or find someone to bring one of these people to them



If a student sends a suicide ideation note, email or messages to a faculty or staff member, the faculty or staff member MUST contact the Principal, Personal Counsellor, or Child Protection Officer immediately.

- If, after following up on notes or rumours, a student is found safe in the school, the Personal Counsellor will meet with them immediately to assess their well-being and the background of the suicide concern. The information will be shared with the student's parents with the recommendation of referral to an outside mental health provider if one is not already involved.
- If the student cannot be located at school, the family will be contacted immediately. If the parents are unaware of the student's whereabouts and safety, the parents will be asked to contact the police.

### **Attempted Suicide:**

In the interests of the care of the child and their safety at school, parents must report to the school (Principal, Personal Counsellor, or Child Protection Officer) any suicide attempt made by their child. If a student has attempted suicide and is deemed ready to return to school, the school will work closely with the student, family and any involved mental health professionals, to support the student upon their return. This would include the development of a Student Safety and Support Plan that outlines:

- Regular contact and communication times with the student to check on their health and well-being
- Any flexible timetable arrangements that may be needed and for what length of time
- Activities, plans and goals to assist the student's well-being at school
- People the student can talk to and their locations.

The student is an active participant in the development of this plan.

### **Other members of the school:**

Support will also be available to any teachers, staff and friends of the student if they would like or need it as the welfare of the community is paramount. Particular attention is also paid to identifying any other at risk students.

### **School Response Protocol:**

In the event of either an attempted or a completed suicide the school has a comprehensive school response protocol to follow that guides the immediate response to the incident and the restoring of well-being in the school community.

### **Resources:**

Association of International Schools in Africa, Child Protection Handbook, May 2014  
Shanghai American School, Child Protection Policy.

“Self-Harm Policy: A Model Policy for Use in Schools / Colleges. “

Cornell Research Program on Self-Injury and Recovery, K. Bublick, J. Goodman & J. Whitlock.

LifeSIGNS Self-Injury Awareness Booklet 2007 By Mary Hillery

Guidelines to Assist in Responding to Attempted Suicide or Suicide by a Student. Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, Victoria, Australia

## **Other School Policies**

Emergency Procedure

Anti-Bullying Policy/Positive Peer Relations