



Safeguarding Children at VIS

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Essential Beliefs

We recognise that:

- We are all responsible for the safeguarding of children.
- We all have a duty of care.
- There are children who are vulnerable to abuse and neglect.
- In Malta a child is considered such until they are 18 years old.

We are committed to the safeguarding of children who may be vulnerable to:

- Neglect
- Physical abuse
- Sexual abuse
- Emotional Abuse

We aim to:

- **Prevent** damage to a child's wellbeing.
- **Provide** a safe environment for all our students.
- **Protect** our students through education on safeguarding.
- **Promote** the safeguarding of children through regular training and information for all members of our community.

We follow a clear protocol of:

- Recognising
- Responding
- Reporting

All our staff are required to:

- Present an up to date police check.
- Sign VIS Code of Conduct.
- Report any concerns regarding the protection of a child.
- Fully cooperate with the relevant authorities in relation to child protection and welfare matters.

Child Protection Policy Principles

Verdala International School (VIS) believes that child protection is an essential element of the school's responsibilities towards children and young people's protection. VIS' priority is to prevent any form of child abuse, violence, exploitation or neglect and to recognize that such acts are a breach of children's human rights. Therefore, ensuring the protection of young people's physical and emotional wellbeing is the school's commitment.

This is reached by our obligation to comply with the Maltese Child Protection Laws together with adherence to Article 19 of the UN Convention on the rights of the child to be protected in and out of the home (UNCRC, 1989) of which Malta is a signatory.

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. As such, educators have a professional and ethical obligation to identify children who are in need of help and protection. We therefore recognize that a liaison will be formed with young people, parents / legal guardians and in certain cases, following a preliminary process, relevant agencies will be involved to promote children's welfare. Outside references to such agencies include, Child Protection Services, Appogg, Domestic Violence Unit, Vice Squad and also when necessary will include Consulates in Malta or/and any other agency as deemed fit for the case. Moreover as educators, we acknowledge the responsibility to protect and take the necessary steps to ensure safety and resolve any form of abuse identified with the aim to support prevention and response to protection related risks. This includes support with referring families to available services as declared in the 2017 Maltese Guidelines.

VIS Students' welfare will always be given foremost consideration. Children have the right to be listened to whilst always considering their age, and in cases of disability, the required assistance will be sought. Students will be made aware of the process should they wish to discuss issues concerning their safety. As such, VIS will distribute this policy annually to all parents and legal guardians, and will communicate the interpretation of this policy annually to students within the PSHE and/or Advisory lesson at a student appropriate level.

Any adult who will work unsupervised with students must be police checked. The possession of a clean conduct for employment at VIS is a prerogative for. CAS mentors and community partner organizations, parent volunteers, host families and after school activities' tutors will be vetted before the running of the activities. When outside agencies are involved, it is expected that the vetting takes place from the part of the agency.

All staff employed at VIS will receive professional development on child protection at the start of each scholastic year and this policy will be distributed. Staff must report suspected incidents of child abuse or neglect whenever the staff member has reasonable cause to believe that a child has suffered, or is at significant risk of suffering abuse or neglect. All procedures will be in accordance with administrative regulations respective to this policy.

To further safeguard our students, all visitors are requested to report to the reception/office (Secondary/Elementary School Sections) to sign in and receive a visitor's pass. Unauthorised visitors and parents are prohibited to take photos of students during school events, assemblies and around the campus.

Definitions of Types of 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.” (WHO, 1999, pp 14)

A person may abuse a child by inflicting harm, or by failing to act to prevent harm. Children may be abused in a family or in an institutional (e.g. school) or community setting. Children may be abused by individuals known to them, or more rarely, by a stranger. Often children may experience multiple forms of abuse simultaneously, further complicating the problem.

Child abuse is defined in four categories; Neglect, Emotional abuse, Physical abuse and Sexual Abuse. The following are definitions as defined by DfE (2016) *and* NSPCC (2017)

Physical abuse is when a child is deliberately hurt and presents injuries such as bruises, burns, cuts or broken bones. It cannot be excused. In most cases physical abuse can cause serious and long-lasting harm and in extreme cases it can lead to death.

Emotional abuse is when a child is continuously maltreated. Emotional abuse can harm a child’s development and mental health which often involves humiliation, fear, isolation and neglect. Generally, children who experience emotional abuse tend to also be going through another form of abuse though one can’t assume that this is always the case.

Sexual abuse is when a child is forced and enticed to participate in sexual activities which may involve violence. Sexual Abuse can also take place through non-contact activities such as forcing a child to look at sexual images or activities, or grooming a child in inappropriate ways often in preparation for abuse.

When there is a constant failure to meet a child’s basic physical or psychological needs, this is considered as *neglect*. Neglect occurs when the primary caregiver fails to provide food, clothing, shelter, medical care and protection from physical or emotional harm. Neglect also takes place when there is lack of response to a child’s emotional needs.

Grooming takes place when a stranger or someone they know attempts to connect emotionally with a child to obtain their trust. This usually is intended for sexual exploitation or abuse. Grooming can occur online or face to face and often children are not aware that they are being groomed and therefore abused.

Online abuse is any type of abuse that occurs on the internet through social networks, playing online games or using mobile phones. Children and young people may experience

cyberbullying, grooming, sexual abuse, sexual exploitation or emotional abuse. Online abuse can be instigated by strangers but also by people they know. Their images and videos can be shared and stored with other people. The abuser can contact them any time and in their safe places such as their homes. Cyber bullying is often considered as a form of abuse which happens on social media, online games, phones and any other means of electronic devices. Cyber bullying can lead children and young people to self-harm, pressuring them into hate and sexual conversations.

Above are examples of abuse, however, possible other types of abuse will be investigated.

Educating our Community

Students

Within the PSHE Curriculum in Elementary and Middle School, topics related to safeguarding and Child Protection are addressed. One can gain further information regarding this from the SSS Handbook.

Furthermore, throughout the year, external agencies provide additional sessions to reinforce the PSHE curriculum. Such sessions include but are not limited to the B.A.B.E.S programme, Sedqa prevention services, Besmart online and the Malta Police Cyber crime Unit etc.

It is worth noting that whenever there is a class that addresses such issues, the correct terminology and child friendly language will be used. If outside agencies are presenting on these topics, parents will be informed.

Parents

When possible speakers are invited to raise awareness with our parent community regarding topics that relate to safeguarding issues. Parent evening and Parent Information Meetings from members of the SSS Department throughout the year will also address specific topics related to the above content.

Staff

This Policy will be circulated and discussed with staff members at the beginning of the scholastic year. A whole school meeting will also be set up specifically to make the staff aware of the Response Protocol but also to address any queries, staff members may have.

The SSS team is available for reference and support when a particular situation or case arises. This will be addressed on a case by case basis whilst respecting the Response Protocol.

Response Protocol

VIS is legally required to respond to issues where child welfare is affected.

Procedures

The following procedures need to be followed when abuse or neglect is suspected or disclosed.

1. Any member of the community who identifies a student as suffering from potential harm/abuse/neglect should report with immediate effect to the Principal and/or Counsellor. This will then be reported to the Head of Student Support Services (SSS), who will then coordinate the Response Management team.

2. In line with VIS Child Protection Policy and the Maltese Child Protection Procedures for Schools, the Response Management Team involves:

- The Head of SSS
- Section Counsellor and Principal and HoS
- Other outsourced personnel depending on the specific case
- Nurse or any other member of staff if applicable

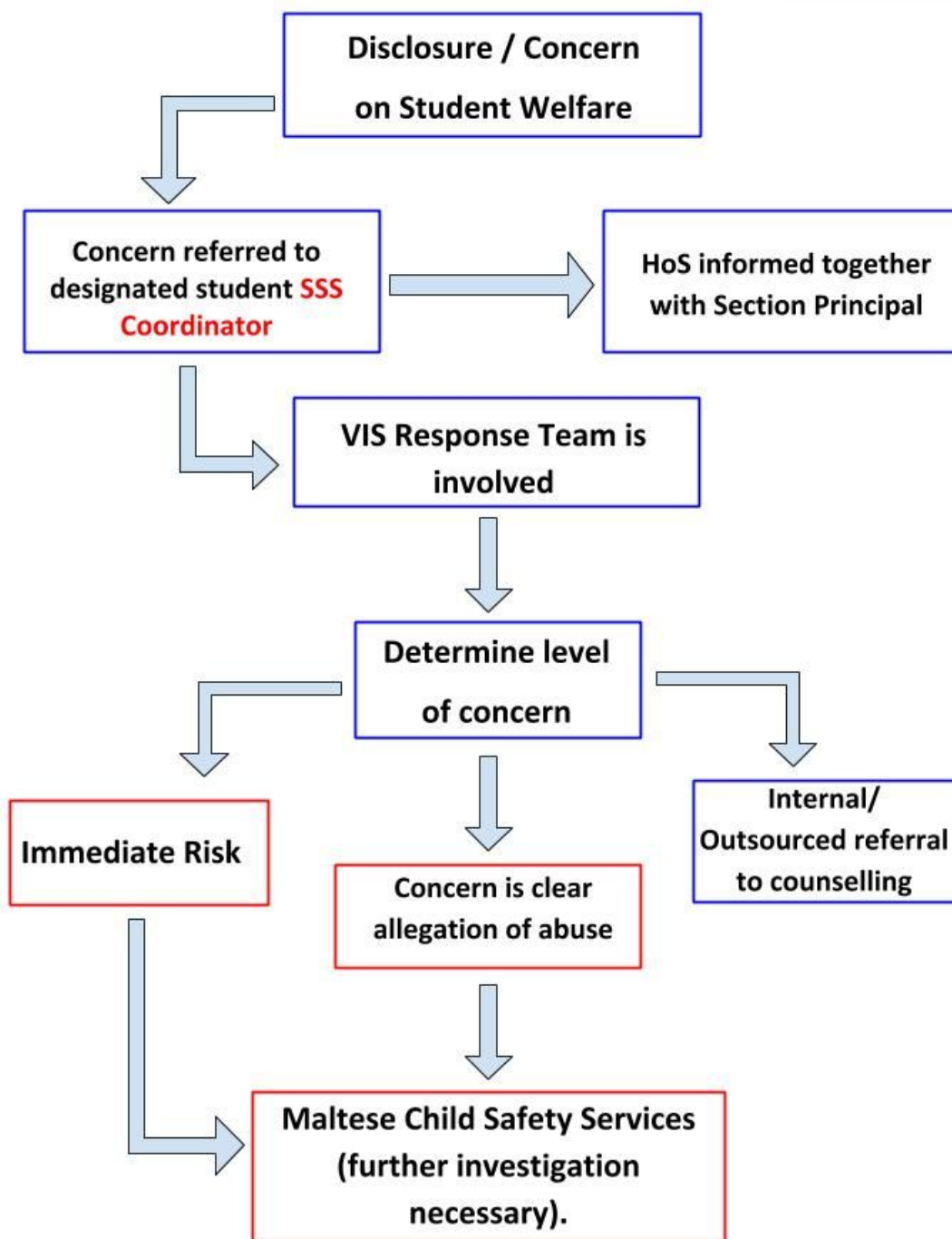
3. All suspicions and/or observations of abuse towards child welfare should be referred to the Counsellor/ Section Principal as soon as possible, ideally within hours (Refer to flowchart)

4. In cases of suspected neglect, an observation period will ensue whilst simultaneously being addressed by members of the SSS team.

5. For those cases where the Child Safety Services (CSS) need to be consulted or involved, the protocol from the Child Protection Procedures for Schools and Referral system will be followed (See Referral Form).

6. When necessary the HoS / Head of SSS shall inform any other outside agencies and include consulates for embassy families.

Response Flowchart



Responding to a Student's Disclosure

Any member of staff, when dealing with a student's disclosure, must:

- Respect and establish the confidentiality parameters with the young person clarifying that such confidentiality will be broken if the practitioner thinks the student is in danger or harm.
- Offer to accompany the student to Counsellor / Principal for further support.
- Whilst reassuring the child, if appropriate the need to involve external agencies is explained.
- The student's testimony will be shared with the Response Management Team.

All documentation pertaining to each case will be locked in a secure filing cabinet. Such documentation will be kept as part of the school records 2 years beyond the student's school finishing age of 16 years.

School Investigation Guidelines

The Head of SSS and Counsellor or any staff member designated by the HoS may:

- Interview the student in the presence of another professional / staff member or outsourced local authoritative representative such as police officer or CSS representative.
- Hold thoughtful interaction and communication with parents and other members of staff as deemed necessary for the student's well being, as guided by the Maltese Child Protection Policy.
- Submit a required referral / report to a local authority for further investigations to take place as determined by the Maltese Child Protection Services.

It is imperative to note that parents cannot request a staff member to present evidence or witness in court procedures unless this is formally requested by a local entity.

Teacher Guidelines

Members of staff are expected to be aware of and adhere to the VIS Code of Conduct. Of pertinent information, members of staff need to be aware of the following:

- Maintain professional boundaries with students whilst in school and out of school. Improper physical contact and inappropriate communication via any form of media as well as inappropriate relationships with students has to be avoided. The members of the teaching profession are duty bound and are ultimately responsible to maintain a professional distance. Teachers are in a position of trust and should avoid circumstances or behavior that could be misinterpreted. Any form of communication will need to adhere to the GDPR guidelines. When specific circumstances call for the need of a member of staff to request students' mobile phones, the HoS's approval will be sought.
- Physical contact should be respectful of boundaries, personal space and cultural sensitivity.
- Any member of staff may only physically restrain a student when that would protect the student from behaviour that can be harmful to the student or any other person. Where possible restraining happens in the presence of a colleague.
- Staff should be aware that infatuations may happen, in such cases the infatuation should be disclosed as early as possible so that appropriate action can take place. Under such circumstances actions/words can be easily misinterpreted.
- Staff should not use personal emails or chat (including but not limited to whatsapp/snapchat/facebook/hangouts) to communicate with students and should only use the school gmail for any communication with students. Specific circumstances such as a field trip abroad or for counselling use, need to be discussed with the HoS.
- Staff working in one-to-one situations with children and young people may be more vulnerable to allegations. Teachers should aim to conduct meetings where every attempt is made to ensure the safety and security needs of both staff and students are met. Examples of this may include arranging for the installation of glass doors or where not possible, leaving the door ajar. If a member of staff is working after school on their own with a child they should invite in another student, or inform another member of staff, leaving the door open.

- Pre-arranged meetings with students away from the school premises should not be permitted unless approval is obtained from their Parent and the Principal. When home tutoring is concerned, it is recommended that the tutoring happens with a parent or relative present in the home setting.
- All children have a right to safety, privacy and dignity when contact of an intimate nature is required (for example assisting with toileting or removing wet/soiled clothing).
- When students are using the showers, such as after a PE lesson, the teacher will stand outside the door and communicate from an external position.
- Children should be encouraged to act as independently as possible and to undertake as much of their own personal care as is practicable. When assistance is required, staff should ensure that another appropriate adult is in the vicinity and is aware of the task to be undertaken.
- Curriculum may tackle topics of a sensitive nature. For further guidance refer to the PSHE section / handbook.
- Teachers cannot promise confidentiality and certain parameters apply when this is breached. Such parameters will be explained at the beginning of the session to the student.

In the case of a staff member reported as an alleged offender, VIS will conduct a full investigation following a carefully designed course of due process, keeping the safety of the child at the highest priority.

Grief Protocol

At VIS, we do our best to provide support for grief in a social, pedagogical manner. It is imperative to point out that cultural sensitivity will be respected on a case by case basis. The following procedures will be implemented:

- A designated staff member trained on grief and bereavement will be assigned to support the student.
- Training and awareness on grief will be implemented with whole school staff members or grade teachers as deemed necessary.
- Implement Coping with Grief workshop with students either through small group approach or grade cohort through PSHE classes.
- When necessary include outside professionals / specialists on Grieving.

The family will be informed of the the steps taken and documentation kept.

Review (2 year cycle) 2020

BOD Approved Dec 10 2018

References

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<https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/publications/children/childprotectionandwelfarepracticehandbook.html>
4. *NSPCC document*, retrieved from
<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/preventing-abuse/child-abuse-and-neglect/online-abuse/>
5. World Health Organisation , Report of the Consultation on Child Abuse Prevention, Geneva, 29-31 March 1999, World Health Organization, Social Change and Mental Health, Violence and Injury Prevention pp. 13-17.

Appendix

National School Support Services
Education Psycho-Social Services
 Triq Fra Gaetano Pace Forno
 Il-Hamrun
 HMR 1100
 2122 6361 / 2122 5943

The Office of the Commissioner for Children
 16/18, Tower Promenade
 St. Lucia.
 21485180

Sedqa
 Agency against drug & alcohol abuse
 Triq Braille
 Sta Venera 441014

Child Web Alert
 Protecting Children Online
<https://fsws.gov.mt/en/onlineabuse>

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