



Child Protection Guidance Note: Abuse Prevention Student Curriculum



Published by the Association of International Schools in Africa (AISA)

March 2020

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ABOUT AISA

The Association of International Schools in Africa (AISA), established in 1969, is a non-profit education association supporting the professional learning and school improvement strategies of international schools on the continent of Africa. Based in Nairobi, Kenya,

AISA offers a professional learning programme specifically designed to meet the unique needs of our diverse member school community. AISA also offers a number of supplementary programmes, scholarships and facilitates collaboration among member schools to advance school effectiveness and improve student learning.



Why teach children about keeping safe?

“I would like to stress [...] the overwhelming importance of two things for organisations in protecting children - a culture of openness, including a willingness to recognise and accept that abuse could happen in any organisation and a robust structure to support the effective reporting and handling of concerns about behaviour.

Moira Gibb, 2016

Child sexual abuse is a significant social problem in just about all societies. Global meta-analyses estimate that 20% of girls and 8% of boys are sexually abused before the age of 18 (Pereda et al. 2009). Child abuse can lead to devastating and long lasting psychological, relational, educational, behavioural and health consequences. It is well documented that many children do not ever disclose abuse with some disclosing only in adulthood. Although it is not the responsibility of children to seek help or alert adults that abuse may be happening, abuse prevention education can facilitate this.

Child abuse is preventable. Schools have a moral and legal responsibility to protect children and young people from abuse at school and in the wider community. It is the responsibility of all adult to prevent and respond appropriately if they suspect a child is at risk of harm. Children may be compliant, but they cannot consent to abuse.

All children and young people have a right to¹:

- be treated with respect and to be protected from harm
- be asked for their opinions about things that affect their lives and to be listened to
- feel and be safe in their interactions with adults and other children and young people
- understand as early as possible what is meant by 'feeling and being safe'
- define their own touch boundaries (i.e. they get to say and define 'unwanted' touch)
- understand that abuse is never the fault of the child
- be taken seriously if they do make a disclosure of abuse

¹ See the Convention of the Rights of the Child



School-based childhood abuse prevention curriculum should help children and young people:

- know accurate names of private body parts and develop confidence and language in talking about their bodies
- recognise appropriate healthy boundaries for relationships with peers and adults (on and offline)
- know who to tell if they uncomfortable or scared (i.e. identify several trusted adults, including some that are non-family members)
- understand what is appropriate and inappropriate touching
- understand grooming behaviour (on and offline)
- understand ways of keeping themselves safe including what to do if someone touches them in a way that is harmful, unhealthy, or without consent
- develop knowledge and skills to assert limits over what happens to their bodies (i.e. develop body autonomy)
- understand persistence may be required when disclosing or seeking help from adults

What does the research tell us about participating in school-based prevention programmes?

- children's knowledge, skills and protective behaviours are improved
- children are more likely to report abuse, or report sooner
- children experience a greater sense of empowerment and reduced anxiety and fear
- teacher-student relationships can be strengthened

Factors of a successful school prevention programme:

- curriculum should foster active student participation including roleplaying, activities, "What if?" games, video modelling and discussion followed by reinforcement
- curriculum should be grounded in the local context and culture, addressing the lived realities of the student population
- curriculum should adopt a positive, empowering approach, and avoid scare tactics and confrontation
- curriculum should be integrated into the regular school curriculum, be developmentally appropriate and fun
- curriculum should include skill development such as assertiveness, problem-solving and communication
- the program needs to include parents

- all school staff need annual abuse prevention training for the environment within the school the be one of recognising, understanding, acknowledging and preventing abuse before it happens and responding immediately if it does occur
- teachers delivering the curriculum need to be trained and given the opportunity to discuss personal beliefs/ experiences and the opportunity to opt out should they not be comfortable delivering the material
- curriculum needs to be regularly monitored and evaluated for quality and effectiveness

For further guidance see [Sample Characteristics of an effective Abuse Prevention Curriculum](#), ICMEC

Disclosure

As implementing an abuse prevention curriculum with students may increase the likelihood of disclosure of abuse, it is important to keep in mind the factors that influence disclosure and the ways in which adults and schools can help children to feel safe when disclosing. Firstly, a few comments on disclosure:


- Disclosure is often delayed until adulthood
- False allegations by a child are extremely rare
- Children who disclose abuse are seeking help as they want the abuse to stop
- Disclosure can be understood as an ongoing process rather than a discrete one-time event

Factors that influence and facilitate disclosure, i.e. children are more likely to disclose if:

- they perceive they will be believed and supported
- they are asked and given enough privacy and opportunity to share their experience
- mistakes are tolerated
- concern for their own safety and the safety of others
- the sexual abuse only happened once
- children live with supportive caregivers
- sexual abuse was committed by a non-family member

Factors that hinder disclosure, i.e. children are less likely to disclose if:

- expectation of negative response, being in trouble, or that they did something bad or shameful
- they fear being blamed or they won't be believed
- they fear upsetting their parents
- they fear the family will be torn apart (or other negative consequences)
- they, or someone they love, was threatened or the offender has power over them

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- the person committing the sexual abuse is a family member, close to the family, perceived as a close friend or someone who cared about them
 - fear of legal proceedings
 - Children want to forget what happened to them, do not want to burden anyone, feel isolated or feel unsure who to trust
 - A lack of awareness or understanding that they are being abused
 - Familial factors: familial violence, rigid gender roles, chaotic family structure, closed or dysfunctional communication, social isolation, patriarchal attitudes, anxious parents
 - Community factors: fear that disclosure would lead to children being treated differently, stigmatized or cause family shame

School factors that facilitate or inhibit disclosure:

- When the school culture has normalised the disclosure of abuse by implementing abuse prevention curriculum and providing multiple, clear reporting pathways for staff and students, disclosure is more likely. Students need to understand what will happen if they disclose abuse
- When the core message of abuse prevention curriculum is, “It’s not your fault” children are more likely to disclose. Other key messages of abuse prevention curriculum that can facilitate disclosure is, “Tell a trusted adult” and “It’s never too late to tell”
- When teachers and counsellors are provided with time for students to ask questions and discuss concerns, especially during prevention curriculum, disclosure is more likely
- When school personnel have knowledge of what abuse is and are aware of the signs and indicators of abuse, they are more likely to be a trusted adult to a child experiencing abuse
- When school personnel have confidence that all child protection concerns will be taken seriously and due process followed, disclosure is more likely
- Prior history or reputation of the child (eg. Prior negative interactions with a child may bias response to a child or positive reputation of offender may inhibit disclosure)
- Tacit acceptance of, or school climate, that normalises sexual harassment, hypermasculinity, discrimination and low-level boundary crossing will inhibit disclosure
- School connection with the parents or family can impact how a disclosure is received and acted upon
- Personal history of abuse by school personnel can impact how they engage with disclosure or prevention curriculum



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