

Child Safeguarding Policy

OBJECTIVE:

The objective of the Child Protection Policy is to create a safe, supportive and responsive environment that upholds the protection rights and dignity of every child in premises of RAHUL Group of Schools (the School). This is to be achieved by establishing effective prevention and early intervention measures, strengthening treatment support services and building partnerships. This is done by engaging with all sectors of society upon whom the wellbeing of children depends, in initiatives that will bring about these changes.

STATEMENT OF COMMITMENT:

The School

- Is committed to the rights and welfare and Protection of children in its premises and opposes all forms of child abuse, especially child sexual abuse and exploitation.
- Is committed to upholding the law on child rights and welfare, as outlined by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and various legal statutes of the prevailing law in India.
- Believes that all children have a right to protection from abuse irrespective of race, social background, age, gender, skin color, disability, religion, caste or beliefs.
- Believes that child abuse and exploitation is not acceptable in any form. Keeping silent and inaction is also wrong, if it is known that a child is being abused or exploited.
- Believes in the importance of child protection, so that not only are children protected from abuse by the School committee (or board of directors) members, staff, and volunteers, but also that preventative measures can be made to protect the School staff, and the School's own integrity.
- Believes that children have the right to participation through any form of expression (in accordance with their evolving capacities) and be heard. Therefore, where possible children will also be included as stakeholders and in research and other relevant reports/evaluations.

Please refer to **Annexure 1 for UN Article 19 and UN Article 34 and attachment for THE Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Bill, 2014**

SCOPE

This policy is applicable to following Eligible Personnel (EPs):

- School staff
- Visiting faculty
- Committee members,
- Volunteers,
- Patrons,
- Visitors
- Personnel of contract

DEFINITION

Child:

A 'child' means anyone who is under 18 years of age.

Age of Consent:

The age of consent is 17 years. It is a criminal offence to engage or attempt to engage in a sexual act with a child under 17 years of age.

Board of Management:

Unless the context requires otherwise, Board of Management also refers to any other person or persons appointed by the patron to manage the School on his or her behalf.

Child Abuse:

Child abuse includes all four categories of abuse i.e. physical abuse, emotional/mental abuse, neglect and sexual abuse.

Employee:

The word "employee" includes School staff.

Employer:

The appropriate School authority or agent. In the case of the School, the Board of Management is the employer.

Parent / Carer:

The phrase "parent/carer" is used to refer to the child's parent or carer as appropriate. A foster parent, or other person acting in loco parentis who has a child in his or her care subject to any statutory power or order of a court and, in the case of a child who has been adopted under the Adoption Acts of India.

School:

Means a recognized primary or post-primary School and includes centers for education as defined in the Right to Education Act and attended by children under the age of 18 years.

School Authority:

This refers to the Board of Management and / or Principal / Vice Principal.

School Personnel:

The phrase “School personnel” is a generic term to encompass all adults who are involved in the operation of the School. It covers employees.

Visiting Faculty:

Adults that engage with children for guest lectures, workshops, guides during school picnic and sports and cultural events if any.

School Premises:

Any premises inside or outside school where children are engaged in relation to school e.g., the School, the transport facilities provided by the School, any premises that children visit during school picnic, workshop, sports and cultural events etc.

Direct Contact with children:

Direct contact with children includes but is not restricted to teaching, being their project guide, conducting guest lectures, conducting workshops, being a guide during school picnic, sports and cultural events, if any, being a part of transport facility provided by the School, being involved in helping children using toilets especially preschool children.

Private Place:

Any place in school premises where EP needs a written permission obtained from Principal of the School to be alone with child. The permission will be given only after The Principal judicially assesses the necessity only after perusing the written justification from EP.

Forms of Child Abuse:

1. Physical Abuse:

Actual or likely physical injury to a child, or failure to prevent physical injury, or suffering, to a child, including deliberate or non-accidental hitting, beating, shaking, throwing, burning, drowning, suffocating or poisoning.

Indicators include, but are not limited to unusual bruises, burns, broken bones, etc.

2. Mental/Emotional Abuse:

Actual or likely severe adverse effect on the emotional and behavioral development of a child caused by persistent or severe emotional ill treatment or rejection. This may involve conveying to the child that they are worthless, unloved or inadequate and cause children to feel frightened, in danger and corrupted.

Indicators include, but are not limited to lack of affect, poor concentration, lack of bonding, etc.

3. Neglect:

The persistent or severe neglect of a child or the failure to protect a child from exposure to any kind of danger, including severe weather conditions and starvation, or extreme failure to carry out important aspects of care, resulting in the significant impairment of the child’s health or development, including non-organic failure to thrive.

Indicators include, but are not limited to underweight, lack of Schooling, chronic health problems, etc.

- Physical neglect can include not providing adequate food or clothing, appropriate medical care, supervision, or proper weather protection (heat or coats). It may include abandonment.
- Educational neglect includes failure to provide appropriate Schooling or special educational needs, allowing excessive truancies.
- Psychological neglect includes the lack of any emotional support and love, never attending to the child, spousal abuse, drug abuse and alcohol abuse including allowing the child to participate in drug and alcohol use.

4. Sexual Abuse:

Actual or likely exploitation of a child, representing the involvement of dependent, developmentally immature children in sexual activities they do not truly comprehend, to which they are unable to give informed consent or that violate social taboos or family rules, such as but not limited to touching a child's genitals, forcing a child to watch or take part in pornography or coercing the child to have sex. It is considered abuse whether or not the child consents. Sexual exploitation is the exchanging of money or other economic favours in return for sex.

Indicators include, but are not limited to pregnancy at an early age, Sexually Transmitted Infection (STI), unusual bleeding, sexualized behaviour above age appropriateness, unusual fear of people or places.

Child Sexual Abuse Includes but is not limited to

- An adult exposing his/her genitals to a child or persuading the child to do the same
- An adult touching/ fondling a child's genitals or making the child touch the adult's genitalia.
- An adult involving a child in pornography which includes exposing a child to pornographic material
- An adult having oral, vaginal or anal intercourse with a child
- Any verbal or other sexual suggestion made to a child by adult
- An adult persuading child to engage in sexual activity

5. Sexual Assault:

If a stranger commits the acts mentioned in point no 1 to 4, it would be considered sexual assault.

BEHAVIOURAL PROTOCOLS

The School expects all EPs to give respect and dignity to all children associated with the work of the School, as well as children within the personal lives of those individuals connected to the School.

Behavioural protocol:

1. Eps with direct contact with children must sign a statement to say that they have read the policy, will respect and abide by it and understand that action will be taken in cases where behaviour is not in accordance to the policy. This will lead to disciplinary action and possible job loss for staff or dismissal of committee members or volunteers who break these protocols.
2. It will not be permissible for EPs to take photographs or video footage of children. Authorization should be sought from the Principal and strict regulations will be implemented on the nature of how photographs are taken. These photographs and/or video will not be used for any other purpose outside the School without prior permission of appropriate authority.

3. EPs must never be alone with children who are not their own offspring in a private place that cannot be readily seen by other responsible adults.
4. Where possible and practical, the 'two - adult' rule, wherein two or more adults of both gender (male/female) supervise all activities where minors or children are involved and are present at all times, should be followed. If this is not possible, the School staff members are encouraged to look for alternatives such as being accompanied by community members on visits to children.
5. EPs will not discipline a child in a way that is against the Convention on the Rights of the Child. This effectively means no tolerance to any form of violence against the child.
6. EPs need to be aware that they may work with children who, because of the circumstances and abuses they have experienced, may use a relationship to obtain "special attention". The adult is always considered responsible even if a child behaves seductively. Adults should avoid being placed in a compromising or vulnerable position.
7. In appropriate behaviour toward children, including failure to follow the School's Behaviour Protocols or sexual abuse of a child is grounds for discipline, up to and including dismissal from employment.
8. EPs must be concerned about perception and appearance in their language, actions and relationships with minors and children. EPs should maintain a high standard of behaviour/character in presence of children. (Example: should not use any unacceptable language in the presence of a child)
9. EPs dress appropriately and need to be culturally sensitive when they visit children, families, communities and programs or work with children.
10. Inexperienced School staff and volunteers should not try to handle children with complicated problems. (Example: children who have been sexually abused). These children should be directed to a team or professionals with the consultation of the responsible officers.

RECRUITMENT AND SCREENING

1. EPs will be carefully and properly screened during their recruitment period, which includes
 - obtaining reference check
 - obtaining a police check where ever possible or necessary (For Transport & Class IV Employees)
 - Signing to agree to the Child Protection Policy and stating that there have been no previous convictions for abuse against children, violent behaviour or improper and unlawful conduct.
 - Ensuring that all the references of approved local candidates for work are checked, preferably by telephone, and recorded in the staff files before the new staff member is appointed to take the position. This will include a verbal and written request to the referee of whether they have any concerns as to why the candidate should be employed to work with children.

In the best interests of children, the School will not hire anyone with a prior conviction for child abuse, pedophilia or related offences. The School reserves the right not to hire an applicant if the background check reveals that the person is not suitable to work with children.

2. EPs agree to inform the principal immediately if new information arises that casts doubt on the team member's trustworthiness with children. Such information would be treated as confidential and disclosed to the individual team member for appropriate action.
3. Individuals who are hired as independent contractors are notified of RAHUL INTERNATIONAL School's Policy and Required Standards for Child Protection and are made aware that they are expected to follow behaviour protocols stated above.

PROACTIVE MEASURES

1. Awareness Training for EPs:

- The School will arrange mandatory Awareness Training on Child Protection for EPs at least once a year.
- EPs who have attended Awareness Training on Child Protection in the past will undergo refresher training once a year.
- The training will ensure that all EPs understand the content of this Child Protection Policy before signing their commitment. The scope of the training will include but not limit itself to Definitions of child abuse, characteristics, causes, handling of disclosure, reporting systems, laws, local multi-disciplinary specific measures open to the School

2. Awareness Program for Children:

The School will implement Awareness Program for pre-primary, primary, secondary school children as well as parents/carers that plays a valuable role in helping children develop the skills necessary to enable them to recognize and resist abuse and potentially abusive situations. eg. workshop such as "good touch, bad touch" – for students and awareness programs for parents/carers.

3. Complaint Box:

A compliant box will be available in the School to enable children, EPs and Parents / Carer to raise a complaint, if any.

RESPONSES TO ALLEGATIONS OF OFFENCES OF STAFF, NON-STAFF, COMMUNITY MEMBERS, FAMILY, ETC.

- EPs will be encouraged to be open in discussing the potential of abuse within the organization.
- Whenever an EP has a reasonable cause to believe that a child, regardless of whether served by RAHUL School, is being abused, that staff must report within 48 hours to the Principal, who will report immediately to local authority utilizing the same Allegation form. In case, Principal is unreachable, inform Director.
- Where an allegation has been made that any of EPs has abused a child, the School will take the appropriate action to deal with the situation.

Process:

1. Where there is an allegation, first inform only to the Principal.
2. In case, Principal is unreachable, inform Head Office personnel.
3. Principal will involve Complaints Committee to start investigation. The Committee will have 50% representation of Women EPs and will be headed by Woman EP.
4. The allegation will be kept confidential, with only those directly involved having the appropriate information.
5. All details will be entered on the School Allegation form and will be filed confidentially.
6. EPs found to be breaking the circle of confidentiality will have disciplinary action taken against them. EPs found to be indulging in this behaviour will receive an appropriate written warning.
7. All investigations will be kept confidential and investigation will start in maximum 48 hours.
8. Relationships with child welfare and legal organizations will be encouraged.
9. Both child and alleged perpetrator will be treated with respect from the start of the process to the end.
10. The School will not dismiss a child's accusation of abuse without appropriate investigation, no matter who the alleged perpetrator is.
11. Investigations will be stopped in case there is written request for dismissal of complaint by Parent/Carer with proper written justification.
12. The School will confer with other appropriate organizations in a case where the child involved requires extra protection.
13. Records will be made of all facts related to the investigation and allegation, and these will be carefully and confidentially filed by the Committee. (Refer to allegation form)
14. If a foreigner is involved, the relevant Embassy will be informed.

COMMUNICATION ABOUT / TO CHILDREN

1. The School recognizes that the world-wide web is increasingly being used by those seeking to abuse children, and that photographs are doctored to create further abuse of children. Therefore, RAHUL INTERNATIONAL School will take appropriate care while posting pictures of children on its website.
2. Where photographs of children are used RAHUL INTERNATIONAL School will take special care to protect children's identities and specific geographic location in all materials.
3. Disclosure of information about past or present abuse of children and any of the persons involved should be limited to only the people who need to know.
4. Communications about children should use pictures that are decent and respectful, not presenting them as victims. Children should be adequately clothed and poses that could be interpreted as sexually suggestive should be avoided.
5. Individuals or organizations requesting the use of the School resources such as videos or photographs should be required to sign an agreement with the appropriate School entity as to the proper use of such materials. The agreement should include a statement that any use of such materials for purposes other than what is agreed upon could subject the borrowing individual or organization to legal action. Furthermore, failure to adhere to the agreed upon use of the material will result in the immediate termination of the Schools' permission to use the subject materials and/or require immediate return of all materials provided by the School as well as any copies of such materials.
6. All correspondence with a child by the School volunteers is reviewed for inappropriate or suggestive comments, requests or obscenities. In the event of inappropriate correspondence being discovered, the School reserves the right to sever the volunteer relationship.

DECLARATION OF COMMITMENT

To be signed by all EPs. A copy will be kept on file in the School office.

I declare that:

1. I have read and understood the RAHUL INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL Child Protection Policy and have attended on _____ [date] child protection training.
2. I will work within the procedure as laid out in t-he RAHUL INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL Child Protection Policy.
3. I have not been accused or convicted of any offence involving physical abuse/ mental/emotional abuse/sexual abuse or sexual assault of children or young people.
4. I understand that if a complaint is brought against me regarding the abuse of children while engaged in RAHUL INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL activities, the allegation will be thoroughly investigated in cooperation with the appropriate authorities.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Annexure 1

UN Article 19

No one should hurt you in any way. Adults should make sure that you are protected from abuse, violence and neglect. Even your parents have no right to hurt you.

UN Article 34

You have the right to be protected from sexual abuse. This means that nobody can do anything to your body that you do not want them to do, such as touching you or taking pictures of you or making you say things that you don't want to say.

Annexure 2

Allegation Form

REQUEST FOR AN INVESTIGATION INTO SUSPECTED CHILD ABUSE

Name of child _____ Age: _____ [M] [F]

Standard: _____ Class: _____

Address _____

Name of Parents/Carer _____ Contact No. _____

Address _____

Employment address _____

Nature and extent of suspected abuse:

Previous injuries, events, and symptoms of note

Identity and address of alleged offender (if known)

Date and signature of staff _____