



The American School of Kinshasa

TASOK Board Child Protection Policy *(taken from the TASOK Board Policy Manual)*

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 American School of Kinshasa endorses the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, of which our host country, The Democratic Republic of Congo 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. 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 staff employed at The American School of Kinshasa must report 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. Reporting and follow up of all suspected incidents of child abuse or neglect will proceed in accordance with the 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 in Kinshasa, to the appropriate child protection agency in the home country, and/or to local authorities.

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

The TASOK Child Protection Policy and Procedure works for the child, for the family, and for our community. Research indicates that international communities are as prone to child abuse as communities in their home country. Child abuse is a multi-faceted issue that involves dynamics of

the child, the family, and the community. The TASOK Child Protection Policy works to respond at all three levels.

Procedure for Reporting Suspected Cases of Abuse and Neglect

STEP 1: When a child reports abuse or there is reasonable cause to believe that abuse is occurring, the teacher will seek advice from Child Protection “Designated Person” as soon as possible. The “Designated Person” (DP) for TASOK is TaShawndra Govan, TASOK Elementary School Counselor. Her contact is tgovan@tasok.net or reach Julie Mullen jmullen@tasok.net +243 840 951 706. The “Designated Person” will take initial steps to gather information regarding the reported incident and will form a School-Based Response Team as needed to address the report. If the “Designated Person” is not available the Director should be immediately informed. The response team will include the director, principals, school nurse, and other individuals as the director sees fit.

In all cases, follow up activities will be conducted in a manner that ensures that information is documented factually and that strict confidentiality is maintained. The following procedure will be used:

- 1.) Interview staff members as necessary and document information relative to the case.
- 2.) Consult with school personnel to review the child’s history in the school.
- 3.) Report status of case to director.
- 4.) Determine the course of follow-up actions.

STEP 2: Based on acquired information, a plan of action will be developed by the School-Based Response Team to assist the child and family. Actions that may take place are:

- Discussions between the child and school counselor in order to gain more information. Depending on the age of the child and if a trained counselor is available to lead these sessions, these discussions may include drawing pictures and playing with dolls to elicit more information about what may have occurred.
- In-class observations of the child by the teacher, nurse, school counselor, or administrator
- Meetings with the family to present the School’s concerns.
- Referral of the student and family to external professional counseling.

In cases of severe abuse or where outside authority is deemed necessary, a request made to the Multidisciplinary team (see flowchart) may result in further investigation and possible actions as appropriate:

- Notification of the management of the sponsoring employer of the concern with the child/family, or to the welfare office at the home-of-record.
- Consultation with the consulate of the country of the involved family.
- Consultation with the school or another attorney.
- Information consultation with local authorities.

STEP 3: Subsequent to a reported and or/substantiated case of child abuse or neglect:

- The DP will maintain contact with the child and family in order to help them access outside support and guidance. At the current time, TASOK does not have the staff to provide professional counseling services.
- The DP will maintain contact with outside therapists and multidisciplinary teams to update the progress of the child in school.

All documentation of the investigation will be kept in the child's confidential school records file. Records sent to schools to which their student may transfer will be flagged to let the receiving school know there is a confidential file for the child. TASOK will make every attempt to share this information to protect the child.

Most cases of suspected abuse or neglect will be handled by the school "Designated Person" with help from professional outside resources as needed, such as those involving:

- Student relationships with peers
- Parenting skills related to disciplining children at home.
- Student-parent relationships
- Mental health issues such as depression, low self-esteem, grieving

Some cases will be referred to outside resources, for example:

- Mental health issues such as depression, psychosis, self-harm, and suicidal ideation

Cases reported for investigation and outside resources:

- Severe and ongoing physical abuse or neglect
- Sexual abuse and incest

In extreme cases when families do not stop the abuse or concerns remain about the safety of the child, reports could be made to:

- Local authorities
- The consulate
- The employer
- The home-of-record welfare office.

