

# **ABUSE POLICY**

## **A Plan to Protect**

### **PRE-SCHOOL STUDENTS, EMPLOYEES, and VOLUNTEERS**

#### **BACKGROUND**

This policy is written for the protection of Edmonton Society for Christian Education (ESCE) staff, volunteers and Preschool students only. ESCE staff includes Preschool teachers, bus drivers and Society Office staff. ESCE volunteers include only those who work together with ESCE staff in Preschool classrooms, school buses and the Society Office.

#### **PURPOSE**

The Edmonton Society for Christian Education has a spiritual, moral and legal obligation to provide a secure environment for volunteers, students and staff participating in school programs which are under the auspices and authority of ESCE.

The Edmonton Society for Christian Education strives to be a place where, in the name of Jesus Christ, hope and wholeness may be found. Knowing that abuse, a prevalent and destructive evil in the world, breaks down hope and withholds wholeness, this school will not tolerate or ignore instances of abuse. Therefore, these policies and procedures are implemented for the protection of all concerned and to reduce the risk of abuse occurring.

#### **Reasons for the Policy**

- Prevention of abuse of children/youth/vulnerable adults.
- Protection of all the vulnerable in our midst.
- To describe a process of screening, recruiting, training, supervising and supporting leaders, staff, and teachers.
- Protection of the organization from lawsuits involving allegations of abuse

It is important to note that this policy requires that schoolteachers and administrators report to the proper authorities all cases alleging child abuse, which includes physical, emotional and sexual abuse.

#### **UNDERSTANDING STUDENT ABUSE**

##### **Abuse Definitions and Behaviours**

Student abuse is defined as follows:

Physical Abuse is using physical force or actions that results, or could result, in injury to a student. It is more than reasonable discipline. Sometimes injury is caused by over- discipline. Injuring a student is not acceptable, regardless of differing cultural standards on discipline. Note: It is never permissible to strike a student.

Emotional Abuse is a pattern of hurting a student's feelings to the point of damaging their self-respect. It includes verbal attacks on the child, insults, humiliation or rejection. A student who is emotionally harmed may demonstrate severe anxiety, depression, withdrawal, self-destructive or aggressive behaviour.

Sexual Abuse occurs when a student is used by somebody else for sexual stimulation or gratification. Sexual activity between students may also be sexual abuse if older or more powerful students take advantage of those who are younger or less powerful.

## **RECRUITING, SCREENING AND TRAINING PROCEDURES**

### **Recruitment of Employees and Volunteers**

To protect students in our care and to be protected from liability, the school must take reasonable action in screening and supervising the workers involved in serving the students. (A court can find the school is legally liable if it is less than systematic and therefore negligent in screening staff and volunteers). Our staffing and student protection policies and guidelines serve to protect workers from accusation.

The Executive Director should submit names of potential employees to the Screening Committee prior to approaching them.

The Executive Director should ensure the applicant has received interim approval from the Screening Committee prior to scheduling the individual to serve.

Each teacher should keep a list of volunteers approved to serve in their class.

### **Interview**

An interview provides the screening committee (see below) with the opportunity to review the applicant in a personal setting. This allows them to ask follow-up questions and to enhance their knowledge of the applicant. The interview will also allow the potential worker the opportunity of asking questions about the reasons behind our student protection procedures. The interview will be conducted by a minimum of one screening committee member and the Executive Director.

### **Criminal Check**

- Each approved worker will be required to submit to a criminal reference from the local Police Authority.
- Any individual who will not comply with such a request will be ineligible to work with the Society.
- The cost for any police checks requested by ESCE will be borne by the Society.
- Police Checks are required, minimally, every three years.
- New workers may begin working for the society after the police checks have been obtained
- The police checks are to be picked up by a Society staff member.
- If there is no criminal record of any sort, the employee/volunteer may be considered for service in the school.
- If there is a record or information that raises concern, a member of the screening committee and the Executive Director will meet to discuss the matter
- If the offense is other than child or sexual abuse, the volunteer may proceed to serve in the school provided the screening committee and the Executive Director agree. The following are criteria to consider when evaluating the information:
  - The number and type of convictions and the age and circumstances of the offender at the time of the offense
  - The length of time between past criminal activity and the present
  - The conduct and circumstances of the individual since the offense
  - The likelihood of the individual repeating the offense

If the offense is related to abuse of children or of a sexual nature, the worker may not be involved in any programs or classes at Edmonton Christian School.

### **Training**

All school workers will be equipped with training regarding child abuse prevention. Each worker must sign a record indicating that they have been trained or have read through this document. That record will be kept in the Society's administration office.

## **IMPLEMENTATION PROCEDURES**

### **Monitoring of Policy**

Society Administration should thoroughly review these policies and procedures as part of their pre-school and bussing program planning.

After initial emphasis on the program wanes, workers might begin to ignore basic policies. Attention must be given to periodic monitoring that examines the following:

- Have all workers been trained regarding these policies?
- Are workers following the required policies and guidelines?
- What obstacles exist in complying with the policies? What is the level of cooperation?
- Do sufficient materials exist for training and information?
- Are the policies printed and available?

Thoroughly discuss each policy and procedure with school leaders. , Work through all concerns. If problems exist in the policies, they should be brought to the attention of the Executive Director.

### **Educating Staff**

- Routines must be established for the training of all new workers who serve the School.
- Group training will occur at the beginning of each new school year.
- Individuals who start after the beginning of the new school year should meet with a designated person to review the policies and procedures.

### **Screening Staff Already Serving**

- Those who have served at Edmonton Christian School prior to September 1, 2006 will not be routinely interviewed or references checked. They will be required to obtain a police check only.

## **POLICIES**

### **Screening, Recruiting and Training:**

- A screening committee comprised of a minimum of three individuals to include the Executive Director, Development Director, and one Society Board member are appointed by the Society Board to be is responsible for screening all volunteers and employees recruited to work with students, as well as:
  - Coordinating annual policy awareness and training sessions;
  - Conducting interviews, reference checks and completing the associated paperwork
  - Soliciting criminal record searches
  - Maintaining a master list of employees and volunteers approved for service at ESCE
  - Ensuring completed records of training undertaken by those working with students, and related documents are stored securely in perpetuity in a central registry file
  - Maintaining the confidentiality of employee records
  - Handling incidents of abuse as they are reported, including communications with the police and media.
- All workers, paid staff and volunteers, will be required to:
  - Complete an application form in the form prescribed by the screening committee
  - Submit a criminal record check from the Police department
  - Participate in seminars or workshops as prescribed by the screening committee directed at issues of student abuse, identification and reporting obligations
  - Read resource material as prescribed by the screening committee directed at issues of student abuse and safety
  - Sign an acknowledgment of having read this policy and related guidelines and agreeing to comply with school policies and guidelines
  - All paid employees not involved in working with students will submit to a screening process as

prescribed by the Society Board. This process will include criminal record checks, minimally every three years, for their own and the School's protection

- Individuals with a known history of having committed abuse as defined in this document or anyone with questionable references will not be permitted to work with students.

#### **Staffing, Supervision, Security & Identification:**

- All preschool classrooms, offices and hallways have windows or doors with windows, allowing for easy viewing by personnel and supervisors. Sight lines through these windows are to remain unobstructed at all times, except in the case of a lockdown. All storage and utility areas are to be kept locked and made accessible only to those who have a need for access.
- All employees and volunteers must wear name tags provided by ESCE which identifies them with the school.
- Security precautions are to be taken for all students admitted to Preschool. Students must be signed-in and released only to those authorized by the parent(s). Doors are to be supervised to ensure students are not able to exit alone and/or cannot be removed from the classroom without the teacher's awareness.
- Names and addresses of parents and students, the name(s) of any designates approved by the parent, and any special concerns (e.g. allergies) will be carefully maintained.

#### **Field Trips, Special Events & Transportation**

- Activities conducted away from the school property are to be pre-approved by the Development Director to ensure that potential risks have been addressed.
- Parents are to be notified at least one week prior to the outing and proper written consent/medical release forms are required for each student participating in the event.
- All school trips and outings must be supervised by a minimum of two approved adult workers.
- Overnight events are not allowed for preschool children..  
Transporting of preschool children may be done by parents and/or their designate only.

#### **Allegations of Abuse and Incident Reporting**

Concerns for a student's safety are to be reported in accordance with procedures prescribed in this document. ESCE will not engage in denial, minimization, or blame. Our response strategy will be based on the following underlying principles:

- All allegations will be taken seriously.
- Situations must be handled forthrightly with due respect for people's privacy and confidentiality.
- Full cooperation will be given to civil authorities under the guidance of legal counsel
- Adequate care will be shown for the well being of victims. The victim will not be held responsible in any way.

#### **Policy Implementation, Monitoring & Amendments**

We will take seriously our policies to prevent abuse and see that they are enforced. The screening committee will work with the Society Board to implement and monitor this policy. Amendments to this policy will be approved by the Society Board.

#### **STUDENT PROTECTION GUIDELINES**

##### **Student Security**

Teachers for pre-school aged children must provide a sign-in sheet and maintain an accurate sign-in procedure including child's name, parent's (or designate's) name and location during that period of time and any special needs.

- A pre-school student will be released to a parent or approved designate only on the basis of prior approval from the parents. Students are never to be dropped off in the pre-school classrooms without a teacher or teacher's assistant present.

- Doors are to be supervised so that students are not able to exit alone and/or a parent cannot take them from the classroom without the teacher's awareness .
- Parents are not to enter the classroom when picking up their student unless requested to do so. This enables the teacher to maintain order and provide the level of security that parents would expect.

### **Staffing and supervision guidelines**

Programs that involve pre school students must always include adequate supervisory personnel. Supervision must be maintained after the event until all students are in the custody of their parents or legal guardians.

- Preschool staff or volunteer workers must obtain the consent of the student's parent or guardian before spending one-on-one time with the student apart from the rest of the group.
- Classroom windows are to remain unobstructed at all times to allow administrators to look in occasionally without interrupting the teaching process and to provide for teacher security
- Administrative staff should make occasional visits to the classroom to make sure the class is properly staffed and supervised

### **Proper Display of Affection**

Touch is an essential responsibility in nurturing lives. Volunteers and employees need to be aware of, and sensitive to, differences in sexual development, cultural differences, family backgrounds, individual personalities, and special needs. Physical contact with students should be age and developmentally appropriate. The following guidelines are recommended as genuine and positive displays of God's love in the context of a preschool classroom:

- Appropriate Touching:
  - Love and caring can be expressed in the following appropriate ways, by:
    - Bending down to the student's eye level and speaking kindly; listening to him or her carefully.
    - Taking a student's hand and leading him or her to an activity
    - Placing an arm around the shoulder of a student who needs comforting
    - Patting a student on the head, hand, and shoulder or back to affirm him or her.
    - Holding a student by the shoulders or hands to keep his or her attention while you redirect the student's behaviour.
    - Gently holding a student's chin to help him or her focus on what you are saying. (important for students with attention deficit disorder)
- Inappropriate Touching
  - Kissing a student, coaxing a student to kiss you, extended hugging or tickling
  - Touching a student in any area that would be covered by a bathing suit.
  - Carrying students or having them sit on your lap.
  - Prolonged physical contact
  - Piggybacking
  - Seductiveness or suggestive contact
  - Any physical contact of any kind that is done for pleasure or satisfaction of employees or volunteers
  - Any touching used to express power or control over a student.

### **Discipline and Classroom Management**

#### **Guidelines:**

- Every employee and volunteer working with students should have clearly defined rules and discipline procedures.
- Students and parents should be made aware of established rules and discipline procedures.
- Discipline problems are to be brought to the attention of the Executive Director or his designate

#### **Preventative Discipline**

- Establish and communicate realistic expectations for the students
- Be sure the lessons taught are meaningful and age-appropriate
- Be fair and consistent with all students
- Focus on positive actions
- Be aware of students with special needs

### **Remedial Discipline**

- Try to deal with the problems individually
- Explain to the student why the behaviour is unacceptable
- Redirect the student to positive action
- Explain the consequences of unacceptable behaviour by defining the correct way to behave as well as the result of the wrong behaviour
- Offer choices that are acceptable to both you and the student

### **Classroom Rule Suggestions**

- One voice talking at a time.
- Quiet hands get answered.
- Use indoor voices
- Obey directions the first time
- Use good manners
- Keep your hands and feet to yourself
- Be friendly
- Visit the washroom before class begins

### **Some examples of inappropriate discipline**

- Corporal punishment of any kind.
- Any words or tone that would cause a student to think he or she is the "problem" (e.g. screaming at a child) rather than a specific behaviour being addressed
- Any words that could cause feelings of condemnation or shame in a student about any aspect of their person-including derisive references to anything physical, emotional, mental, or position in life, such as saying "Are you a strong boy? Strong boys don't cry" or shame on you."

### **Suspicious Behaviour**

Some conduct requires counsel and advice from a supervisor while other conduct requires reporting. Refer to Incident Reporting Procedures in this document should a legitimate allegation occur.

- Any inappropriate conduct or relationships between ESCE employees and a student must be confronted and investigated.
- Prompt warnings must be issued when appropriate, and the situation monitored very closely.
- ESCE employees should note when a student appears aloof or withdrawn, or exhibits a marked personality change. This may indicate a problem that deserves attention. See "Symptoms of Abuse" in this document.

## **INCIDENT REPORTING PROCEDURES**

### **Anticipated Abuse:**

Abuse or neglect need not have already occurred for a student to be in need of protection; it is not necessary to wait until a student has been harmed to intervene. When abuse or neglect can be reasonably anticipated and there are

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reasonable grounds to believe a student is in need of protection, the legal obligation to report applies.

**Historical Abuse:**

Abuse or neglect that occurred in the not very recent past must be reported wherever there are reasonable grounds to believe that a student may be in need of protection. If the alleged offender is in regular contact with a student or students, irrespective of whether it is the same student or students abused in the past, there may be grounds to believe that the student or students are at risk based on the offender's past behaviour. It is particularly vital to report these incidents where the alleged abuser is in a position of trust concerning students, such as a teaching position.

**Reporting a concern**

If any person has any concerns regarding the safety of a student(s), it should be reported immediately to the Executive Director or his designate.

In these matters it is important to keep the information restricted to those who need to be advised. Suspicions of abuse should therefore only be reported to the Executive Director. It then becomes the Executive Director's responsibility to contact the local Police Authorities, who are best equipped to handle such issues.

The only claim of confidentiality, which overrides the legal duty to report, is solicitor-client privilege. Therefore, physicians, clergymen and others professionals who consider their professional relationships confidential for certain purposes are not exempt from the duty to report student abuse or neglect.

The Executive Director will work with the informant to document the concern, noting all efforts at handling the incident. Such a report will be copied to the Chair of the Board immediately. The Executive Director and the Board Chair will assess the incident to determine whether reasonable ground for concern exists and if it requires reporting. A follow-up report will be completed. Both this and the Executive Director's initial report will be required if the incident is reportable. Both are to be kept on the individual's file..

Where an employee is involved in the suspicious behaviour or allegation, the Board Chair is to be immediately advised.

**When a Legitimate Allegation Occurs**

The Executive Director (or designate) will communicate the incident immediately to those who need to be informed. (i.e. Board Chair).

The Executive Director(or designate) is also responsible to contact and report the incident to the local Police Authority office and to contact the School's legal counsel — such an incident is not to be handled without outside professional assistance.

If the incident involves either a paid employee or volunteer, a team of three members to include the Executive Director and Board Chair and the person with "reasonable grounds" shall interview the person suspected of abuse. Immediate suspension of duties shall result when an ESCE employee or volunteer is suspected of abuse and reasonable evidence exists as to his/her involvement until a complete investigation and decision has been made. The Society Board will make a decision to maintain or suspend his or her income until the allegations are cleared or substantiated.

Do not attempt an in-depth investigation. This should be left to professionals who are familiar with such cases.

Do not prejudge the situation, but take the allegations seriously and reach out to the victim and the victim's family. Showing care and support help to prevent further hurt. Remember that the care and safety of the victim is the first priority. In some situations, schools have responded in a negative or non-supportive manner to the alleged victim. This can increase the anger and pain of the victim and the victim's family. Future reconciliation will be more difficult and the possibility of damaging litigation increases.

Treat the accused with dignity and respect.

If the request is urgent, and the social worker is unable to visit the school and show photo ID, the protection social worker may telephone from his/her office

**NOTE that:**

The social worker is to identify him/herself.

She/he is to explain the information they are requesting and the process to be followed. They WILL NOT ask for information at this time. DO NOT give information at this time.

Verify the social worker's identification by calling the Agency, checking with the telephone directory for the Agency office number, etc. Once identification has been established, provide whatever information is requested. Ask to be kept informed of future developments in the case.

If identification of the social worker cannot be confirmed, the Executive Director is not to give out any information. Request a personal meeting, and have the worker bring photo ID.

Social workers designated to receive reports are trained to investigate and assess the need for intervention. Other professionals must not assume this function. A professional who does so and fails to report commits an offense. The Child Welfare Act protects an individual when a report is made. No action would be taken against a person making a report unless it is made maliciously or without grounds for the belief.

**Response to the Victim**

When the student (other person) first comes, be sure to take his or her word seriously. Do not deny the problem, but stay calm and listen to the student (other person)

Give emotional support, reminding the alleged victim that he or she is not at fault. Tell the person that he or she was right in disclosing the problem.

Do not promise the victim that no one will be told.

Staff should never interview the victim in detail or suggest to them that they have been abused.

**The Child Welfare Report**

As part of a child protection investigation, social workers are required under the Child Welfare Act to assess:

- The child's current state of health;
- Their sense of safety and their views of abuse;
- Previous abuse, neglect or harm;
- The ability of the parents(s) to care for and protect the child

The social worker will talk to people who have contact with the child and family. They may request records or other types of information. They are entitled to whatever information is needed to complete the investigation. If denied access to a record, they can seek a court order.

**School Follow-up and Discipline**

The school should protect students and parents as much as legally possible from undue interference by outside authorities into their family life.

The school should ask the Police Services Authority if it could assist in helping the hurting family.

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The school should maintain frequent communication and supportive relationships with those suspected or guilty of child abuse as long as these persons exhibit a willingness to listen, change and seek help.

This does not exclude the need for hurting individuals to receive professional counseling.

### **Public Relations**

The Executive Director (or designate) should serve as the ONLY spokesperson for any allegation.

Everyone involved in the operation of the school should be made aware of who this person is, and make no comment but refer all inquires to the Executive Director. He will speak to the media regarding the matter, if required, in a discreet, informed, truthful and diplomatic way.