

SRI AUROBINDO INTERNATIONAL CENTRE OF EDUCATION

CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

The Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education (SAICE) is an integral part of Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry and operates under the guidance and in pursuance of the teachings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

The entire focus of the School is to keep the child at the centre of all activity, to enable each individual to blossom and develop in accordance with her / his interests and passions and deeper aspirations.

SAICE believes in the integral development of the child. It focuses on holistic school safety, where every student has a right to a protective environment, free from violence, harassment, abuse and neglect, and based on respect for each child. This Child Protection Policy (CPP) addresses multiple dimensions of the vulnerabilities faced by a child during the entire cycle of engagement with the school. It takes its responsibility with all seriousness to ensure that every child who participates in the school's activities enjoys a safe environment and is protected from any harm. In line with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which states that all children have a right to protection, SAICE accepts that it has a duty of care and obligation to protect those children for whom we are given responsibility. We acknowledge that the welfare of children is the highest priority and that it is the responsibility of everyone in SAICE to ensure that they are protected.

This approach enables all children to access, participate in and benefit fully from the many learning opportunities in a space that inspires their confidence and holistic sense of well-being. This Child Protection Policy focuses on the development of children by providing them a safe and caring environment in school campuses/school trips/ boardings. It provides guidelines to protect SAICE students from Physical Violence, Mental Harassment and Sexual Abuse. This Policy covers abuse, harassment, and offences that can occur in school campuses and in premises under the control of the Institution, as well as extended environments such as outings/picnics/ school trips etc i.e. as long as students are under the

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supervision of SAICE staff. The Child Protection Policy (CPP) aims to protect SAICE students and applies to SAICE School Staff/ Teachers/ Visitors/ Parents/ Visiting Faculty/ Third Party Service providers who directly interact with students of SAICE on campuses or on school trips.

SAICE promotes a Child-Rights friendly atmosphere that is non-discriminatory, humane, and considerate and protects the best interests of each child. The school has a Child Sensitive Environment which is non-threatening, where a child feels comfortable and can be herself / himself.

PREAMBLE:

As an educational institution SAICE has a responsibility to ensure that all children are protected from all forms of abuse, exploitation or neglect.

For the best interests of the child:

All decisions taken by the management and individual teachers must be carefully considered to ensure that the best interests of children are served.

Non-Discrimination:

All children are protected and assisted regardless of gender, race, nationality, caste, religious or political beliefs, family background, economic status. All children are entitled to enjoy equal rights and receive equal services, fair treatment and respect.

Zero Tolerance:

SAICE follows a “ zero tolerance “ approach to any act of violence, bullying, abuse etc. in the school premises, school buses and such extended environments, as defined in this Child Protection Policy.

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Self-Determination

All children are given the opportunity to express their ideas and views on matters affecting them and to have their wishes considered carefully by the institution.

SAICE aims to provide a safe, friendly, and healthy environment in which children can grow and develop.

The following guidelines protect the child from abuse and others from malicious prosecutions. This CPP is based on inputs taken inter alia from the laws in force in India such as the Indian Penal Code, 1860, POCSO Act 2012, Information Technology Act 2000 and international conventions and instruments such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).

DEFINITIONS

In this Policy, unless the context otherwise requires, -

“**Child**” means a student admitted and enrolled in SAICE

“**Child Abuse**” is any deliberate behaviour or action which includes all forms of physical violence, mental /emotional harassment and sexual abuse that results in actual or potential harm to the child’s health, development or dignity and endangers child safety. This may occur from staff to child or child to child;

“**Complainant**” means a student or staff member of SAICE who complains of any act or penal offence covered in this CPP and includes the parent(s) and guardians of such student;

“**Complaint**” means any allegation in writing of an act or penal offence covered in this CPP;

“**Communication Device**” has the same meaning as assigned to it in Section

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2(1)(ha) of Information Technology Act, 2000

“**Computer**” has the same meaning as assigned to it in Section 2(1)(i) of Information Technology Act, 2000

“**Computer Network**” has the same meaning as assigned to it in Section 2(1)(j) of Information Technology Act, 2000

“**Cyber Bullying**” means any form of intimidation or harassment, using a computer, communication device or computer network or the Internet;

“**Mental Harassment**” means and includes insults, ridicule, humiliation, name-calling and repeated threats to cause physical violence to a child;

“**Penal Offence**” means any offence that is punishable under the law with corporal punishment and/ or fine, such as, offences defined and punishable under the Indian Penal Code, 1860 and/ or POCSO Act, 2012 and/or the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act 2015 or any other law in force on the date of the incident;

“**Physical Violence**” means any act or conduct which is of such a nature so as to cause bodily pain, harm, or danger to life, limb, or health or impair the health or development of the child;

“**Bullying**” or “**Ragging**” means any disorderly conduct by any student whether by words, spoken or written, or by an act which has the effect of teasing, treating or handling with rudeness any other student, indulging in rowdy or undisciplined activities which causes or is likely to cause annoyance, hardship or psychological harm or to raise fear or apprehension thereof in a fresher or a junior student or asking the students to do any act or perform something which such student will not do in the ordinary course and which has the effect of causing or generating a sense of shame or embarrassment so as to adversely affect the physique or psyche of a fresher or a junior student. The cause of indulging in ragging is deriving a sadistic

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pleasure or showing off power, authority or superiority by the seniors over their juniors or freshers.

“Sexual Assault” has the same meaning as assigned to it in Section 7 of POCSO Act, 2012.

“Sexual Harassment” has the same meaning as assigned to it in Section 11 of POCSO Act, 2012.

“Staff” means all teachers, office staff, helpers, volunteers, physical education Group Captains, coaches, whether paid or unpaid.

“Stalking” means following a child and contacting or attempting to contact such child to foster personal interaction repeatedly despite a clear indication of disinterest by such child; or monitoring the child by internet, email or any other form of electronic communication.

OFFENCES AND OTHER ACTS COVERED UNDER THIS CPP

The following offences and acts constitute the cause of action for making a complaint under this CPP:-

- a) Cyber Bullying
- b) Cyber Stalking
- c) Mental Harassment
- d) Penal Offences
- e) Physical Violence
- f) Ragging / Bullying

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- g) Sexual Assault
- h) Sexual Harassment
- i) Stalking

It is clarified that the aforesaid acts and offences are not mutually exclusive.

Scope and Responsibility for Implementation

The Child Protection Policy and its required standards seek to minimize risk for all children involved with or assisted by SAICE staff.

This policy applies to:

All students of SAICE, all teachers and staff and individuals who assist or have access to the children served by the organization.

SAICE is responsible in ensuring that the Child Protection Policy is read by / explained to all staff and that all staff acknowledge their understanding of the policy.

To ensure that the Child Protection Policy remains relevant, effective and informative to SAICE teachers and staff in carrying out their respective responsibilities as outlined below, the organization will revise and update the policy as and when required.

Personnel Recruitment, Screening and Orientation:

All prospective staff must be informed of SAICE's Child Protection Policy immediately at the start of any recruitment process.

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Basic screening of prospective staff for positions of those likely to work with or have access to children, will include reference checks. During the recruitment process, applicants must be asked about previous work with children.

SAICE reserves the right to not hire or to terminate a candidate if a background check reveals that the person is unsuitable to work with children and /or may put children at risk.

Policies and behavioral standards are reviewed during new staff orientations, including procedures for reporting suspected abuse and any disciplinary/legal actions that may be taken in the wake of an ongoing investigation.

All new personnel will acknowledge receipt and understanding of SAICE's Child Protection Policy.

Behavior Standards for SAICE Personnel

Behavior Standards are guidelines of appropriate and proper behavior for SAICE staff, which are designed to protect children. SAICE has a Code of Conduct for its teachers and staff (appended)

SAICE personnel must be conscious of the perception and appearance of their language, actions, and relationships with the children they work with. This is especially significant in male-staff interactions with female children and vice versa. Consequently, extra care must be given to protecting the reputation of both the children and SAICE staff by ensuring that language and behavior interactions reflect appropriate and respectful relationships.

SAICE personnel are expected to respect the rights of children in the school, upholding the rights and principles contained in the

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POCSO Act 2012 at all times, whether on or off duty.

SAICE personnel must not stay alone overnight with one or more minor children, whether in the staff member's home, school or elsewhere unless a parent/guardian or relative is present at all times or has expressly given sanction for this to the School authorities in writing.

SAICE personnel must not fondle, hold, kiss, hug, or touch minors in an inappropriate or culturally insensitive way. Under no circumstance should any physical contact have the appearance of being sexual in any way.

SAICE personnel must not hit, slap, pull, or use inappropriate physical force of any kind on a minor child.

SAICE personnel must be aware that the adult is always considered responsible for his or her response, even if a child behaves inappropriately. Staff should be prepared for and conscious of such behavior, and thus avoid being placed in a vulnerable position.

When possible and practical, the "two-adult" rule ought to be followed: Two or more adults of both genders should supervise and be present during all activities outside the classroom in which minor children are involved. If an adult is having an individual conversation with a child, another adult must be present within visible vicinity.

Inappropriate conduct toward children, such as failure to follow the behavioral standards stated above, is grounds for disciplinary action through a 3 stage process - warning, warning plus suspension and finally stoppage of interactions with minors or teaching/PE coaching. Depending on the circumstances of each case, any stage may be by-passed.

Reporting and Investigating Abuse or suspected Abuse

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Child abuse occurring within SAICE, including physical, emotional and sexual abuse, is a serious offence that threatens the well-being and reputation of the child, the staff, and of the organization itself. Child abusers are not likely to remain in an environment in which staff identify and report suspicious behavior. Thus, all SAICE personnel are mandated reporters of suspected child abuse or exploitation to the SAICE Child Protection Committee.

Any person who has knowledge of a potential child protection issue involving any SAICE personnel or between children should immediately contact the SAICE Child Protection Committee. A written report should be made within 24 hours to allow for a timely investigation and/or early intervention as needed. Failure to report suspected child abuse or misconduct may result in disciplinary action.

A child may make a complaint on her/his own accord with or without the consent of the parents. If possible, the complaint should be taken in writing from the child. In case the child is incapable of doing so due to the circumstances, she/he may narrate the incident(s) and this may be transcribed by the SAICE Child Protection Committee.

All such written complaints must clearly detail the date and time of the incident(s), name the persons involved, mention any witnesses, state who all have already been spoken to prior to making the complaint (to enable proper investigation) and describe the events as clearly as possible.

The internal investigation, while respecting and prioritizing the privacy and rights of the child, will be initiated by the Committee within 48 hours after receiving the written complaint. The investigation will be conducted by the SAICE Child Protection Committee. The investigation may require that the child undergo a Government Doctor's check up, in case of noticeable physical abuse or if the complaint is of such nature, which must be conducted on a timely basis.

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The investigation must be treated with care and sensitivity, as the child may fear retribution and punishment, and a staff member accused of child abuse may be concerned for his or her privacy and legal rights.

A staff accused of abuse or misconduct with a child must be temporarily suspended during the course of the investigation. The staff must be informed in writing that a complaint has been made against him/her and given an opportunity to respond in writing. The staff must also be informed that SAICE has an obligation under the Law that it must abide by.

In order to avoid frivolous complaints, SAICE will insist on signed, written complaints in order to take appropriate steps, except, as detailed above, when a child wishes to make a complaint.

False complaints received will be viewed seriously and those making them will be liable to appropriate action under the law.

On occasion, a child may share details of some difficult situations with teachers or staff while insisting on the maintenance of secrecy. In such cases, the concerned adult individual should use appropriate judgment and if he/she believes that the case involves matters of a sexual nature, the student must be told that the matter will necessarily have to be report to the Child Protection Committee while assuring all possible confidentiality.

It is the express responsibility of all staff of SAICE to treat all matters relating to a student with the greatest confidentiality. Situations and events must never become talking points or the subject of loose talk and gossip.

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SAICE Child Protection Committee

The SAICE Child Protection Committee shall be constituted by the Registrar and contact details of the members will be put up on the Notice Board of the school.

The SAICE Child Protection Committee will serve as a complaints, redressal, and advisory body, and shall lead and monitor the implementation of the SAICE Child Protection Policy and Code of Conduct.