Child Protection Handbook

Child Helpline: 116

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o   Beliefs and Core Values

At the American International School of Lesotho (AISL) We believe in the dignity and worth of each student, and recognize the importance of his/her responsibility to his/her fellow person in the world community. We believe that all of our students should have equal opportunity and access to a quality education consistent with their individual capabilities and with their personal and social needs. We believe that change is a constant factor in life. Therefore, education should encourage students' development of personal values, and critical thinking processes, which will facilitate their adaptability to a changing society. We believe that learning is a continuous journey. Therefore, education should foster independent thinking, exploration and experimentation as a life-long process.

Statement on Child Protection and Safeguarding

o   At AISL, our primary commitment is to foster a secure learning environment for all students, with a particular emphasis on those vulnerable to mistreatment or neglect. We are dedicated to preventing, intervening, and repairing harm related to identity, always placing the safety and welfare of our students at the forefront.

Our commitment to child protection involves comprehensive measures to prevent and address situations where children may be at risk of harm, neglect, or abuse. Safeguarding goes beyond mere protection; it aims to create a positive and nurturing environment for students' academic, social, and emotional development. This commitment extends beyond our school walls, necessitating collaboration between the school and our parent community

At AISL, we treat these instances of identity-based harm as concerns of Child Protection. Moreover, our school is dedicated to collaborating with teachers, administration and parents to incorporate trauma-informed restorative practices when addressing identity-based harm, when appropriate. This approach aims to uphold the agency and dignity of the targeted individual while fostering responsibility and accountability for those responsible for the harm.

Educators, given their unique position to observe and engage with children over time, hold a professional and ethical responsibility to identify those in need of assistance and protection. Every AISL staff member is mandated to report suspected incidents of abuse, neglect, and identity-based harm. Our professional development programs ensure comprehensive training and access to resources for recognizing and responding to incidents.

We value parents as partners and believe we all play a vital role in reinforcing the principles of child protection at home and school, ensuring a seamless extension of a safe and supportive environment.

Building on our commitment to child protection, we've enhanced efforts, including the appointment of a dedicated Child Protection Officer. This role encompasses policy development, staff training, reporting and inquiry procedures, risk assessment, prevention strategies, collaboration with external entities, and support for students and families.

By fostering an environment of awareness, communication, and support, we strengthen our collective ability to protect and nurture every child in our community. Together, we create an atmosphere where children feel safe, heard, and empowered, ensuring their well-being and fostering a culture of openness and trust.

Child Protection Policy Statement

AISL is committed to the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of the Child, and has demonstrated this commitment throughout this Child Protection Policy Handbook.   Child protection policy and procedures at AISL apply to all enrolled students, regardless of age. AISL students are referred to collectively herein as child, children and/or students.In alignment with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, AISL seeks to be a safe haven for all students, particularly those who may be experiencing abuse, neglect or harassment. AISL endorses the UN's Convention on the Rights of the Child, of which our host country Lesotho is a signatory, and has a zero tolerance policy for child abuse, neglect, and harassment.

As such, AISL makes this policy available annually to all parents, communicates this policy annually to students, provides training for all staff, makes every effort to implement hiring practices to ensure the safety of children, and reviews the policy annually for compliance and effectiveness. Child abuse and neglect are concerns throughout the world. They violate children's human rights, and are obstacles to children's education, as well as to his or her physical, intellectual, and emotional development.

All employees at AISL must report suspected incidences of child abuse or neglect whenever the employee has reasonable cause to believe that a child has suffered, or is at risk of suffering abuse or neglect. Reporting and follow up of all suspected incidences of child abuse or neglect will proceed in accordance with administrative regulations respective to this policy, which will be reviewed annually by the Director, and Child Protection Officer and/or Child Protection Team. Furthermore, cases of suspected child abuse or neglect might be reported to the respective consulate in Maseru, to the appropriate child protection agency in the home country, and/or to local authorities.

O   Definition of Child Protection

Our member organization, the A*ssociation of International Schools in Africa (AISA), Child Protection Handbook*   describes child protection as the following, "Child Protection is a broad term used to describe philosophies, policies, standards, guidelines and procedures to protect

children from both intentional and unintentional harm. Please note that this definition also includes harm to self." AISL affirms this description, and throughout this policy document has provided the guidelines and procedures needed to safeguard our students.

AISL has adopted the definition of child abuse and neglect as defined by the World Health Organisation (W.H.O). According to W.H.O the World Health Organisation, child abuse constitutes, *"all forms of physical and/or emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect or negligent treatment or commercial or other exploitation, resulting in actual or potential harm to the child's health, survival, development or dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust or power".* **(WHO, June 2020, paragraph 2).**

Personal Safety Curriculum

The curriculum is developmental and based upon the recommendations of The Association of International Schools in Africa (AISA). It is not intended - does not claim - to educate children about sex, sexuality, the sexual functions of private parts or human love relationships. It is intended to teach children about rights to assert limits over what happens to their bodies and to give them the tools necessary to communicate effectively if someone violates those personal boundaries. In short, sex abuse prevention education teaches children how to prevent themselves from being victims of criminal behavior. The curriculum modules implemented for AISL from Pre-Kindergarten to Grade 8 are adapted from the AISA Child Protection Handbook 2016 Version) AISA-CP-Curriculum-Guidance-2016.pdf, and the Social Emotional Learning & Child Protection Standards (SELCSP) and Benchmarks for International Schools.

GRADE	Concept 1	Concept 2	Concept 3	Concept 4	Concept 5
PreK/KG	Safe Touch	Unsafe and assertive	The Touching rule	Safety step	What to do if someone breaks the touching rule
Grade 1	Safe and unsafe	The touching rule	Whom to tell	Safety Steps	Using the touching rule and safety steps
Grade 2	Identify/unsafe touch	Identifying unwanted	Touching rule and safety	Whom to tell and	Secrets about

		touch	steps(including peers)	assertiveness	touching
Grade 3	Identifying safe, unsafe, unwanted touch	The touching rule and safety steps	Telling touching secrets(whom to tell and how)	Learning to be assertive(standing up for yourself)	
Grade 4	Identifying safe, unsafe, unwanted touch	Review the touching rule and safety steps	Assertiveness skills	Whom to tell, why it's important, whom to trust, who can help	
Grade 5	Identify safe and unsafe situations	Review touching rule and safety steps	Whom to tell, why it's important, whom to trust, whom can help	Relationships and assertiveness	Secrets and responsibilities (promises)
Grade 6	IDENTIFY! Safe and unsafe situations	ACCESS! Trusted persons and support structures	ACT! To stay safe	VALUE! Self, others and community	
Grade 7-8	IDENTIFY Safe and unsafe situations	ACCESS! Trusted persons and support structures	ACT! To stay safe	VALUE! Self, others and community	

The key to this approach is our comprehensive Personal Safety Curriculum together with other resources, which operates on multiple fronts to equip students with knowledge and skills necessary to navigate the complexities of personal boundaries, safe interactions, and potential risks.

- To address the emotional and development needs of our students, we have integrated a Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) program from Pre-K to Grade 5. This involves weekly lessons delivered by our teachers for now. These lessons are designed to enhance students' self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision-making

- To specifically safeguard our students against harm and abuse, we have incorporated child protection and personal safety lessons into our SEL curriculum. These lessons

empower students with crucial knowledge, such as understanding appropriate names for private parts, recognizing safe and unsafe touch, and responding if they feel uncomfortable. Students also learn how to establish a safe network of trusted adults, fostering a sense of agency and support.

- Students in Grades 6-8 are provided Pastoral Care engaging in open and informed conversations that extend beyond conventional discussions of boundaries and personal safety. Recognizing the evolving needs of students in these grade levels, our approach goes further to empower their voices and cultivate a sense of agency.
- Advisory is also designed with their unique developmental needs in mind. The curriculum delves into not only traditional concepts of personal safety but explores topics relevant to the evolving social dynamics and challenges faced by adolescents

o **Types and Signs of Child Abuse:**

The identification of signs of abuse and neglect is a complex and sensitive matter that requires careful consideration. It's important to recognize that individual circumstances vary, and cultural, social, and contextual factors can significantly influence perceptions and interpretations. The signs discussed here are general indicators and may not definitively indicate abuse or neglect. Cultural diversity plays a crucial role in shaping parenting practices and community norms. Any concerns about potential abuse or neglect should be approached with cultural sensitivity and assessed within the specific context.

Child Abuse, according to the World Health Organization, involves all forms of physical and/or emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect, or negligent treatment, as well as commercial or other exploitation, resulting in actual or potential harm to the child's health, survival, development, or dignity within the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust, or power. Abuse may manifest through the infliction of harm or by the failure to act to prevent harm. It's crucial to recognize that these forms of abuse are often interconnected, and the impact on the child can be profound.

AISL recognises five types of abuse and neglect:

- Physical abuse
- Sexual abuse
- Child-to-child abuse
- Emotional and psychological abuse
- Neglect

Physical abuse is defined as the intentional use of physical force against a child that results in - or has a high likelihood of resulting in - harm to the child's health, survival, development, or dignity by a parent, person responsible for the care of the child, or any member of the AISL community. This includes, but may not be limited to, hitting, beating, kicking, shaking, biting, strangling, scalding, burning, poisoning or suffocating. Much physical violence in the home is inflicted with the intention to punish the child. Physical abuse is one characterized by an imbalance of power, where a person in a position of responsibility or trust inflicts harm on a child, leading to immediate or long-term negative consequences for the child's health and well-being.

Possible Indicators of Physical Abuse

Teachers and parents should be aware of any indicators of abuse. These can sometimes appear as physical, or emotional changes in a child's behavior. This is not an exhaustive list, but gives some guidance.

Physical signs of abuse can include:

- Unexplained injuries such as bruises, welts, burns, or fractures that cannot be explained by the child or that are inconsistent with their developmental abilities
- Injuries with clear patterns, such as belt marks, handprints, or burns from specific objects
- Presence of injuries in different stages of healing, suggesting repeated trauma.
- Injuries on areas of the body that are not commonly injured accidentally, such as the back, buttocks, or genitals
- Sudden changes in behavior, such as withdrawal, aggression, anxiety, or excessive fear
- A decline in academic performance or engagement in school activities
- A child may shy away from physical contact or flinch at sudden movements
- Expressing fear or reluctance to go home or be in the presence of specific individuals
- Inconsistent or vague explanations for injuries or reluctance to explain how injuries occurred
- Frequent absences from school without plausible explanations
- Seems frightened of the parents and protests or cries when it is time to go home
- Abuses animals or pets

Identifying signs of abuse and neglect in children is crucial for their safety and well-being. However, it's important to note that these signs may not definitively indicate abuse, and they can also be associated with other issues. If you observe multiple signs or have concerns, it's crucial to seek support from the Child Protection Team.

Discipline vs. Punishment

Discipline for children involves training and helping them develop judgment, a sense of boundaries, self-control, self-sufficiency and positive social conduct. Discipline is frequently confused with punishment, particularly by caregivers who use corporal punishment in an attempt to correct and change children's behavior. There are several differences between discipline and punishment.

Positive strategies of discipline recognize children's individual worth. They aim to strengthen children's belief in themselves and their ability to behave appropriately, and to build positive relationships. On the other hand, punishment involving either physical or emotional measures often reflects the caregiver's anger or desperation, rather than a thought-out strategy intended to encourage the child to understand expectations of behavior. Such punishment uses external controls and involves power and dominance. It is also frequently not tailored to the child's age and developmental level.

Corporal punishment entails the use of physical force. It has been commonly used in many societies in the past, and the exact form it takes varies according to culture and religion. Research has shown, though, that it is not effective in promoting the desired change in behavior in any lasting way. The behavioral and emotional consequences of corporal punishment vary according to how frequently and how severely the punishment is applied, as well as to the age, developmental state, vulnerability and resilience of the child. Corporal punishment can cause relationships to break down. It serves to humiliate children and can lead to physical injury and serious impairment in development.

All children need discipline and it is best if children can be supported in developing their own self-discipline. An approach to discipline should be encouraged that uses alternatives to corporal punishment. These include such methods as distraction and redirection, cooling-off period, the setting of rules and limits appropriate to the child's age and development level,

problem-solving and the withdrawal of privileges. AISL employees are obligated to follow up on reported or suspected cases of corporal punishment.

Sexual abuse is defined as the involvement of a child in sexual activity that he or she does not fully comprehend, is unable to give informed consent to, or for which the child is not developmentally prepared, or else that violates the laws or social taboos of society. Children can be sexually abused by both adults and other children who are - by virtue of their age or stage of development - in a position of responsibility, trust, or power over the victim.

Possible Indicators of Sexual Abuse in children may include:

- Sudden and unexplained changes in behavior, such as becoming withdrawn, overly compliant, or excessively aggressive
- Regression to younger behaviors, such as bedwetting or thumb-sucking
- Heightened fear or anxiety, especially around specific people, places, or activities
- Frequent nightmares, sleep disturbances, or a sudden fear of going to bed
- Demonstrating knowledge or interest in sexual acts or pornography that is inconsistent with their age
- Engaging in explicit sexual play or demonstrating age-inappropriate sexual behavior
- Avoidance of specific individuals, especially adults, without an apparent reason
- Unexplained genital infections, pain, bleeding, or discomfort
- Expressing self-harming behaviors or thoughts of suicide
- Complaints of pain or discomfort when walking or sitting
- A sudden decline in academic performance or engagement in school activities
- Excessive secrecy or inappropriate knowledge of sexual behaviors
- Creating drawings, stories, or play activities with sexual content that is not age-appropriate
- Has difficulty walking or sitting
- Suddenly refuses to change for PE or to participate in physical activities
- Reports nightmares or bedwetting
- Demonstrates bizarre, sophisticated or unusual sexual knowledge or behavior
- Experiences a sudden change in appetite
- Attaches very quickly to strangers or new adults in their environment
- Becomes pregnant or contracts a sexually transmitted infection
- Runs away

- Reports sexual abuse by a parent or another adult

The Caregiver:
- Is unduly protective of the child, or severely limits the child's contact with other children, especially of the opposite sex
- Is secretive and isolated
- Is jealous or controlling with family members

Who sexually abuses children?

It's impossible to describe a typical abuser. They look and act in various ways, can be found in all areas of society and are often well-respected members of our communities. They often appear to be kind, caring people who are great with kids. Abusers work hard to cultivate this image - so people will not suspect them of, and won't believe it if they are ever accused of being sexual with children and they have acted on those thoughts.

- Nearly all child sexual abuse is committed by people known to children and families, including
    - Family members such as parents, siblings, grandparents, uncle, and cousin.
    - People in a family's circle of trust such as friends, neighbors, clergy members, teachers, and coaches.
- Most abusers are male - although females also sexually abuse children.
- Over a third of abusers are under the age of 20.

How Abusers "Groom" Children

Grooming is a subtle, gradual, and escalating process of building trust with children and adults to gain access to and time alone with the children. It is deliberate and purposeful. Abusers may groom children for weeks, months or years before any sexual abuse takes place. It usually begins with behaviors that may not be considered to be inappropriate.

Grooming may include:
- Befriending a child and gaining his or her trust
- Testing a child's boundaries through telling inappropriate jokes, roughhousing, backrubs, tickling or sexual games
- Moving from non-sexual touching to "accidental" sexual touching. It can happen during play so the child may not even identify it as purposeful, inappropriate touching. It's often done slowly so the child is gradually desensitized to the touch.

- Manipulating the child to keep a secret about what is happening. The abuser may use the child's fear, shame, or guilt about what's happening to get them not to tell. They may also use bribes, threats, or coercion
- Confusing the child into feeling responsible for the abuse. Children may not notice or become confused as the contact becomes increasingly intimate and sexual.

Grooming adolescents may include additional strategies, such as:
- Identifying with the adolescent. The abuser may appear to be the only one to understand him/her
- Displaying common interests in sports, music, video games, television shows, etc
- Recognizing and filling the adolescent's need for affection and attention
- Giving gifts or special privileges to the adolescent.
- Allowing or encouraging the adolescent to break rules (e.g., smoking, drinking, using drugs, viewing pornography).
- Communicating with the adolescent outside of the person's role (e.g., teacher or coach). This could include texting, emailing, connecting via social media with the teen with the teen without the parents' knowledge or permission.

> **Cultural diversity plays a crucial role in shaping parenting practices and community norms. Any concerns about potential abuse or neglect should be approached with cultural sensitivity and assessed within the specific context.**

Emotional and psychological abuse involves both isolated incidents, as well as a pattern of failure over time on the part of a parent or caregiver to provide a developmentally appropriate and supportive environment. Acts in this category may have a high probability of damaging the child's physical or mental health, or the child's physical, mental, moral or social development. Abuse of this type includes: undue restriction of movement; patterns of belittling, blaming, threatening, frightening, discriminating against, or ridiculing; and other non-physical forms of rejection or hostile treatment and also being witness to abuse such as seeing or hearing another person being harmed as in domestic violence or substance abuse.

Possible Indicators of Emotional and Psychological Abuse:

The Child:

- Can become very sensitive to criticism.
- Craving attention constantly.
- A child will appear defensive when an adult approaches them or reaches near them for something.
- When a child becomes withdrawn, particularly from activities or people who they would normally enjoy spending time with.
- Extreme risk taking behaviors, which may involve bodily harm.
- No longer trusting someone or a location.
- A change in friendship groups.
- Language and conversations involve content that is inappropriate and out of character.
- Persistent feelings of worthlessness, inadequacy, or a lack of self-confidence.
- Social withdrawal, avoiding peers, or isolating themselves.
- Displaying heightened fear, anxiety, or excessive worrying, especially about pleasing others.
- Exhibiting behavior that is more typical of a younger age, such as bedwetting or thumb-sucking.
- Acting out aggressively or sudden and unexplained changes in behavior, mood, or personality.
- Delays in the development of language, motor skills, or other milestones.
- Overly compliant behavior, where the child is excessively eager to please and avoid conflict.
- An extreme fear of making mistakes, coupled with an intense desire to be perfect.
- Extreme shyness or fear of social interaction.
- A child avoiding eye contact or being excessively watchful and wary of others.

The Caregiver:

- Constantly blames, belittles, or berates the child
- Is unconcerned about the child and refuses to consider offers of help for the child's problems
- Overtly rejects the child

Neglect is a persistent failure to meet the basic needs of a child such as: food and clothing, appropriate supervision, failing or refusing to give adequate medical care and attention. Neglect can also take the form of simply ignoring a child. The parents of neglected children are not necessarily poor. They may equally be financially well-off. This can include inadequate supervision, failure to provide essential medical care, insufficient nutrition, or lack of appropriate shelter. Neglect can hinder a child's physical, emotional, and cognitive development, leading to long-term consequences for their health and overall quality of life.

Possible indication of Neglect in children may include:

- Persistent issues with personal cleanliness, such as dirty or unwashed clothing, body odor, or untreated health conditions.
- Consistently appearing underfed or malnourished, with signs like frequent hunger, weight loss, or stunted growth.
- Wearing inappropriate or inadequate clothing for the weather, or repeatedly wearing dirty or torn clothes.
- Lack of medical care for ongoing health issues, dental problems, or chronic illnesses.
- Repeated and unexplained absences from school, as a result of neglecting to ensure the child's attendance.
- Decline in academic performance due to a lack of support, resources, or involvement from caregivers.
- Leaving a child alone for extended periods, especially when the child is too young to care for themselves.
- Failing to provide emotional support, love, and affection, leading to emotional neglect.
- Persistent untreated injuries or medical issues, indicating a lack of attention to the child's health and safety.

The Caregiver:

- Appears to be indifferent to the child
- Seems apathetic or depressed
- Behaves irrationally or in a bizarre manner
- Is abusing alcohol or other drugs

Bullying and Harassment

AISL is committed to ensuring that the working and learning environment is harassment-free. Sexual harassment will not be toerated, and that action will be taken against those who breach

the policy.All members of our school community are valued and have the right to learn and work in an environment which is free, inclusive, conducive to learning and free from harassment, violence and bullying. Everyone has the right to come to school feeling happy, secure, comfortable and respected. Harassment in any form is not acceptable at AISL and will be dealt with seriously and expediently.

- ***Definition of Bullying***

  Bullying is repeated verbal, physical, social or psychological behavior that is harmful and involves the misuse of power by an individual or group towards one or more persons. Conflict and fights between equals and single incidents are not defined as bullying.

- ***Definition of Harassment***

  Harassment is behavior that targets an individual or group due to their identity, race, culture or ethnic origin, religion; physical characteristics; gender; sexual orientation; marital; parenting or economic status; age; ability or disability and that offends, humiliates, intimidates, or creates a hostile environment. Harassment may be an ongoing pattern of behavior, or it may be a single act.

Examples of Bullying and Harassment

- Physical: hitting, pushing, touching, grabbing, looks, stares, facial expressions, gestures, spitting, taking or damaging property.
- Verbal or written: spoken or written, threats, suggestives comments, name-calling, unfair criticism, spreading rumors
- Social: forming groups to leave out, ignore and disrespect; influencing, encouraging or organizing someone else to be involved in any type of bullying and harassment.
- Sexual: unwanted sexual advances, other unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature; types of bullying and harassment such as that described above that is based on a person's sexuality or sexual orientation; abuse, comments, including name calling that suggests something about a person's sexuality or sexual orientation.
- Graffiti: using pictures, tags or words.
- Cyber: using e-mails, voice and text messaging, social networking sites, photographic and video images.
- Forms of cyberbullying may include;
  - Sending offensive text messages, instant messages, pictures, or prank phone calls

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- forwarding private emails, messages, pictures or videos to other, unintended recipients
- using a person's screen name or password to pretend to be them
- posting negative comments or compromising pictures
- intentionally excluding others from an online group
- threats, unauthorized publication of private information or images etc
- exclusion via social media group

o   **Procedures for Reporting Suspected Abuse and Neglect**

o   AISL recognizes that all cases of suspected child abuse, neglect or harassment require careful, confidential and prompt investigation. Where there is cause to suspect child abuse or neglect, it is the responsibility of the staff member to report their suspicions to the CPT, or to the Child Protection Officer (CPO). In all cases, the CPO will notify the Director. All AISL employees are also required to report suspicion of abuse or neglect and must be made within 24 hours, no matter how small for immediate response. AISL may report cases of suspected child abuse and neglect of an American citizen (student) to the Regional Security Officer at the United States Embassy by the Director.

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o   Flowchart
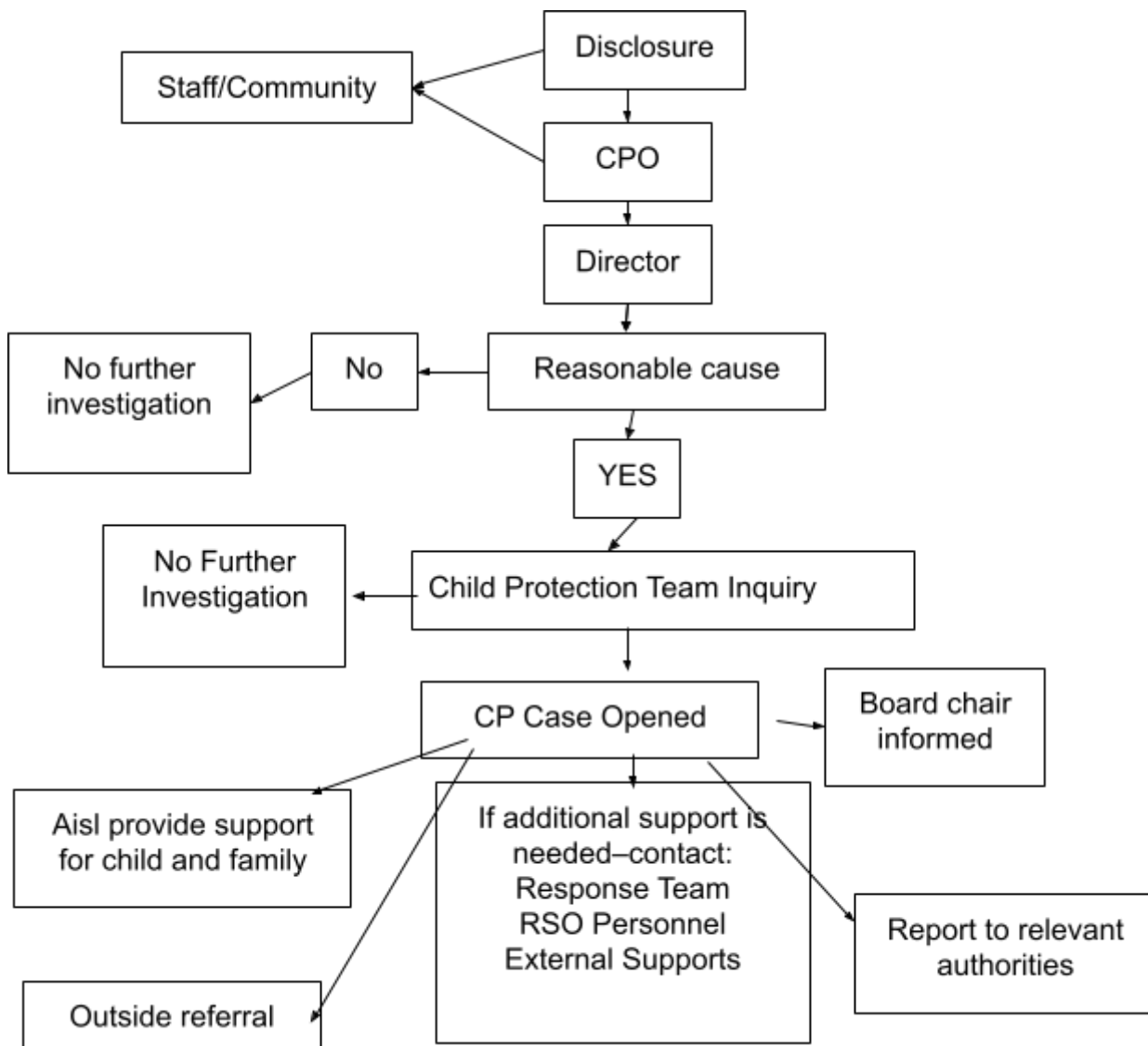
The six key stages of the AISL reporting and responding procedures are:
1. Disclosure/Concern
2. CPO– Reports to the Director; Collectively determine if a CPT Inquiry is needed
3. CPT Inquiry (The team discusses reasonable cause, and determines next steps, and if the Response Team is needed)
4. Case Opened
5. Ensuring Safety

6. Response Plan
7. Follow-up

The **AISL Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy is a comprehensive framework designed to ensure a safe and nurturing educational environment. It recognizes the individuality of each child, the importance of family support, and the collective responsibility of the entire school community in fostering a secure and conducive learning atmosphere. This approach underscores the school's commitment to holistic child development and the promotion of a supportive community for all its members.**