Child Abuse Reporting Policy

Preamble

Heritage Christian Online School (HCOS) is committed to the prevention of child abuse and the enhancement of the well-being and safety of the students entrusted to its care. This commitment is made first and foremost as an ethical and legal responsibility but is also recognized as a response to government and societal expectations for the well-being and safety of students.

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to provide specific guidance to the employees and contractors of Heritage Christian Online School (HCOS) to support child abuse prevention efforts and establish clear reporting protocols when child abuse is suspected or known to have occurred.

Guiding Principles

The following guiding principles are provided to inform all parties serving children and families.

- The safety and well-being of children are the primary considerations in all actions and decisions.
- Children are entitled to protection from abuse, neglect, harm or threat of harm.
- A family is the preferred environment for the care and upbringing of children, and the responsibility for the protection of children rests primarily with the parents.

Roles and Responsibilities Under the CFCSA

While the primary responsibility for child safety rests with parents, child welfare workers are legally mandated under the Child, Family and Community Service ACT (CFCSA) to intervene, as directed by the Provincial Director of Child Welfare or Indigenous Child Welfare director, when a parent is unwilling or unable to fulfill this responsibility due to abuse, neglect, or other serious concerns.

As members of the community of support for students, staff and contractors play a vital role in reporting suspected cases of abuse, neglect or both. Timely reporting is essential for staff at the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) and Indigenous Child and Family Service Agencies (ICFSAs) to assess and address concerns effectively.

Recognizing Child Abuse and/or Neglect

Child abuse and neglect can manifest in multiple ways, including physical, sexual, or emotional abuse, or when a child's basic needs for safety, care, and support are unmet. Children and youth are also deeply harmed by witnessing family or intimate partner violence. Section 13 of the Child, Family and Community Services Act outlines the specific legal circumstances under which a child is

deemed to be in need of protection.

Responsibility to Report Child Abuse and/or Neglect

- Any school personnel who suspect or have information that a child is being abused, or at risk of being abused, must promptly contact the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) and Indigenous Child and Family Service Agencies (ICFSAs) and the Appointed School Official (ASO) or Alternate Appointed School Official (AASO)

> If a child is in immediate danger, school personnel should call police (911 or local police) to intervene.
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> Children and youth in British Columbia can call the **MCFD Helpline for Children** at 310-1234 (no area code needed) or 1-877-631-8282 at any time, day or night, to speak directly with a social worker.
>
> To make a report, call the **MCFD** at 1-800-663-9122 or Indigenous Child and Family Service Agencies (ICFSAs) at any time, day or night. The person who answers will make sure concerns are directed to the right place.
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> To contact the **ASO**, Heads of Schools, Sara Kraushar or **AASO's**, Director of Inclusive Education, Kat Grootjes or Director of Flex Academy, Bri Dyck, refer to the numbers in the Student at Risk Team page.

- If school personnel are uncertain whether a specific situation or circumstance should trigger a report, they must seek immediate guidance from administration, the Appointed School Official (ASO) or the Alternate Appointed School Officials (AASO) to seek guidance.
- The reporter need not be certain. It is the child welfare worker’s job to determine whether abuse or neglect has occurred or is likely to occur.
- Reporters should:
    - **not** contact the parents or guardians who may be involved in allegedly abusing the child; this is the responsibility of the child welfare worker.
    - Cooperate fully with any resulting investigation, including assisting with the interviews of children and staff as necessary.

- HCOS will protect personal information regarding the investigation, including the reporter’s identity, against improper or unauthorized disclosure or use. Reporters should **not** share information with outside agencies about child abuse investigations, particularly if the police are involved.
- The ASO or AASO will ensure that the school environment is safe during any investigation.
- School personnel will support students who are victims of child abuse or neglect.

The Role of ASO & AASO

- The ASO or AASO has the primary responsibility for responding to and determining the proper course of action with regard to allegations of abuse or neglect involving school employees, volunteers, contract service providers, or others on school property or supervising any school activity outside of the school.
    - Where there are allegations of child abuse by a **school staff member**, the ASO or AASO is responsible to investigate the allegations and report the matter to a Child Welfare Worker if there is reason to believe that the child is in need of protection, or the police if there is reason to believe the child is in imminent danger or that a criminal offence has been committed. The ASO or AASO has the authority under the Independent School Act (ISA), Section 7 (2) (b) to suspend a school staff member whose presence threatens the safety and welfare of students.
    - Where there are allegations of child abuse by a **staff member, volunteer, contract service provider or other persons,** the ASO or AASO has the authority to issue a No Trespass Order prohibiting attendance at school events by a person whose presence threatens the safety and welfare of students. The order, provided orally or in writing, to the volunteer, contracted service provider or other person, and copied to the police, must specify the date of issue, the reason for the order and the termination date of the order (such orders may be re-issued on an annual basis if required). This authority is provided under the Trespass Act, s. 2 (1), (b)(c).
    - If the ASO is the alleged abuser, then after reporting to the previously mentioned agencies, please report to one of the AASO's, the Director of Inclusive Education or Director of Flex Academy, who will notify the Chief Operating Officer, or the Chair of the Board for Kelowna Christian Center Society (KCCS), who will notify the board of KCCS.

- School personnel who have reason to believe that another employee, volunteer, contract service provider or other person attending or supervising a school activity has abused a student, must report the incident or information to the ASO or AASO. It is the responsibility of the ASO or AASO to investigate the allegations and, in collaboration with the school personnel, determine what action is required.
- The ASO or AASO must inform parents of children alleged to have been abused in the school setting of the allegations and the outcome of the school investigation, unless there are special circumstances, e.g., relating to a child protection or police investigation, or endangerment of the child.

Duty to Report Professional Misconduct

- An authorized person (certificate holder or a person who holds a letter of permission), must promptly provide the commissioner a written and signed report if the authorized person has reason to believe that another authorized person has engaged in conduct that involves sexual abuse or sexual exploitation of a student (Teachers Act, s 38 (1)(b)).If the ASO or AASO suspends, dismisses or disciplines an authorized person for misconduct that involves physical harm to a student or minor, or significant emotional harm to a student or

minor, the ASO or AASO must without delay send to the commissioner a report regarding the suspension, dismissal or disciplinary action (ISA s. 7). If an authority suspends, dismisses or disciplines an authorized person, the authority must without delay notify the ASO or AASO who must without delay report the matter to the commissioner (ISA s. 7.3).

Staff Training and Review

- Administration will annually review with school personnel the information on different types of child abuse, recognizing child abuse and/or neglect and types of disclosures that abused children may provide (this information is available in The BC Handbook for Action on Child Abuse and Neglect, pages 16-22)
- ASO and AASO will ensure that annual training is provided to all teachers, educational assistants, administrators and any support staff who are working with children, and ensure they are aware of and understand how to carry out their legal duty when responding to concerns about child abuse and/or neglect.
- Training will include recognizing child abuse and/or neglect, what actions are required, prevention measures, reporting child abuse and/or neglect protocols, and everyone's legal responsibility if they suspect abuse and/or neglect of a child.

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