



GSC School Safeguarding Framework (“Framework”) - 02/24

Safeguarding policies, practices and protocols are implemented to reduce the risk of children being harmed. While no set of policies, practices or protocols eliminate all risk factors, we believe that schools following the Framework below will significantly mitigate risks to students. This Framework was created by a collaborative team of professional educators with significant safeguarding experience who believe it represents an effective and accessible approach to significantly mitigating school-based safeguarding risks.

When implementing any program, host country child protection laws should always be followed.

This Framework was developed through collaboration between the [Global Safeguarding Collaborative](#) (GSC) and [The International Centre of Missing and Exploited Children](#) (ICMEC). The GSC team would also like to thank the [International Task Force for Child Protection](#) (ITFCP) and the [Association of International Schools in Africa](#) (AISA) for their excellent resources outlining best practices.

A range of collaboratively collated resources are available to assist with the Framework on the GSC website via the [GSC Shared Resources Library](#). This Framework will be revised regularly based on feedback from GSC members and other safeguarding professionals' experience.

A companion **GSC Framework Self-Assessment Calculator** can be found [HERE](#)

Safeguarding Framework Categories:

1. [Personnel/Safeguarding Teams](#)
2. [Recruitment](#)
3. [Policies](#)
4. [Communications](#)
5. [Professional Development](#)
6. [Responding to Allegations](#)
7. [Curriculum](#)
8. [Extracurricular Programs](#)
9. [Parents/Community](#)
10. [Facilities](#)
11. [Action Plan/Auditing](#)

Safeguarding Framework Levels:

- **Level 1 (Essential)** - Policies, protocols, and practices fundamental to an effective safeguarding program.
- **Level 2 (Emerging)** - Policies, protocols, and practices that build on a solid safeguarding foundation.
- **Level 3 (Established)** - Most advanced level of safeguarding policies, protocols, and practices.

1. Personnel/Safeguarding Teams

Level 1

- ☐ The school's Senior Leadership Team (SLT) agrees that the health and safety of all students is the school's number one priority.
- ☐ Roles for Child Protection Officer (CPO) and/or Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) are created to oversee and maintain the school's child safeguarding program. These roles should be filled with qualified personnel who are, whenever possible, members of the school's leadership team.
- ☐ A clear CPO/DSL job description exists and is annually shared with the entire school community.
- ☐ Non-negotiable child safeguarding responsibilities are listed in all job descriptions, including mandated reporting responsibilities and adherence to the school's Code of Conduct.
- ☐ The school employs qualified counselors who provide adequate access and relevant resources to support student mental health and well-being throughout the year.
- ☐ A standing committee (Safeguarding Committee) exists that creates, implements, and regularly reviews the School's safeguarding policies, protocols, procedures and guidelines.
 - **Note:** This committee should include students and parents, as appropriate, for policy development and case studies only. Students and parents should *not* be involved with actual safeguarding allegations.
- ☐ An effective system exists to assemble a team (Safeguarding Response Team) that coordinates the school's response to any safeguarding allegations.
 - ☐ Within the Safeguarding Response Team, create working norms and a designated individual who will communicate with families, community members, staff, local authorities, international authorities, and the media regarding child protection and any allegations that are reported.
 - ☐ Ideally, the Safeguarding Response Team would include:
 - CPO/DSL
 - Senior Leadership
 - Counselor/s & Medical personnel
 - Law enforcement (*if needed or required*)
 - Embassy/Consulate//Government Department (*as applicable*)

Level 2

- ☐ Responsibilities, agendas, and meeting frequency of the Safeguarding Response Team are clearly documented.
- ☐ The School ensures a Board/Owner safeguarding liaison is appointed who meets regularly with and is available to support school leadership and the DSL/CPO on student safeguarding-related topics.
- ☐ Procedures are developed to ensure that external vendors/contractors are trained in non-negotiable safeguarding practices.
 - The team may request and should evaluate external vendor policies on child protection and training of their employees.
 - ☐ If no policies are in place, the school should mandate all external vendors read, understand, and sign the Code of Conduct (in a mutually understood language)
 - ☐ Please contact the [GSC](#) if assistance with this is required

Level 3

- ☐ Systems are in place to use the school's DSL/CPO job description as a checklist for their appraisal/performance review.
- ☐ Systems are in place for the DSL/CPO to receive external supervision/coaching, as part of their role.
- ☐ The school involves students and parents in safeguarding policy development.

2. Recruitment (*Please refer to the [GSC Safer Recruitment Checklist](#) for a more detailed checklist*)

Level 1

- ☐ The school checks the social media presence (Google, Facebook, Twitter, etc.) of all candidates, including keywords like candidate's full name (and any other versions of their name), educator, and abuse.
- ☐ Administrators contact a minimum of **three** references for past employment, including the most recent supervisor, asking specific safeguarding questions.
- ☐ The school asks specific child protection questions related to training and roles/responsibilities during initial rounds of interviews.
- ☐ The school has a system in place to collect background checks of all potential employees who work with children in the school for every country they have lived in for more than 6 months (whenever possible), including the country of passport/residency. This process can be coordinated by the school, through an external service, or by the applicant themselves.
- ☐ The school clearly understands how to communicate safeguarding concerns about staff seeking employment elsewhere that is in line with the host country's local laws.

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Level 2

- ☐ The school's commitment to child safeguarding is clearly stated in all job descriptions, job postings, and job application websites (*refer to United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*).
- ☐ A system is in place for renewing background checks for existing employees at least once every 5 years.

3. Policies

Determine if your school's host country signed or ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), and is therefore subject to the related international law. You can find the [signatories of the UNCRC](#) at this link. These rights will inform your policies, procedures, training, and curriculum, so it's helpful to know if your country supports them.

Level 1

- ☐ The school has a clear understanding of local child safeguarding laws (especially laws involving offenders and victims of child abuse) in their host country and refers to any applicable laws when creating policies, protocols, and procedures.
- ☐ The school has a Safeguarding/Child Protection Policy in place that is reviewed and revised annually.
- ☐ The school has a Code of Conduct that is reviewed and signed by all members of staff and associates (volunteers, contractors, coaches, and anyone else who works with children) annually.
 - The Code of Conduct is translated into the local language of the host country, or other languages, as necessary.
- ☐ The school's policy requires annual in-person student safeguarding training to staff and associates that includes reference to the Code of Conduct.
- ☐ The school requires all visitors to acknowledge a visitor code of conduct.
- ☐ The school has a standardized written/electronic process for stakeholders to report and document any reported safeguarding concerns. This process is clearly communicated and easily accessible.
- ☐ The school has a child safeguarding handbook of policies and procedures that includes:
 - Child Protection Policy Statement
 - Student Safeguarding Code of Conduct
 - In the Code of Conduct, the school requires all faculty/staff to report child safeguarding concerns and communicates that "Failure to report incidents will result in disciplinary action up to and including termination of contract."
 - Definitions and signs of abuse and neglect
 - Safeguarding Committee/Safeguarding Response Team roles and responsibilities
 - Safer Recruitment & Hiring practices
 - Incident reporting requirements
 - Training plans
 - Professional boundaries: avoiding behavior that leads to allegations

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- Guidelines for disclosure, reporting, and follow-up
- Response to disclosure flow chart
- Process of how disclosed or reported concerns are documented
- Applicable Local laws
- Community partners
- Online safety policies
- Child-on-child abuse policies
- Excursions, school events, and student travel safeguarding policies
- Procedures for managing low level concern reporting
- Allegation Response Plans (students & parents, students & Staff, students & students)
- Responsible Use policies for students and adults
- Anti-bullying policy
- Safe touch policy
- Bathroom Use/Student meeting guidelines

Level 2

- ☐ Systems exist to introduce the Code of Conduct to every stakeholder group who works with children throughout the school. Each stakeholder group reviews and signs the Code of Conduct annually. Time is given in meetings for everyone to read the Code of Conduct and ask questions before signing.
- ☐ The school has a Whistleblowing policy that allows members of the school community to raise concerns about staff members without fear of retaliation.
- ☐ The school has online safety & communications policies that include social media guidelines and guidelines on images and videos of children (in line with local data protection laws if applicable).
- ☐ The school has a policy for managing low level concerns/disclosures.
- ☐ The school has an intimate care policy that provides guidelines for helping young students and students with injuries and disabilities with changing and toileting as necessary.
- ☐ The school has a supervision policy that outlines supervisory requirements for students throughout the school day, at school events, and during off-campus trips.
- ☐ The school has a changing room policy if students are required to change for physical education classes or other activities.

Level 3

- ☐ The school implements Risk Assessments for all activities on and off campus (e.g., field trips, changing rooms, private lessons, sports trips, etc.).
- ☐ The school has a secure single central record to maintain safeguarding records for all employees and adults who work with students.
- ☐ The school has a system in place for checking if newly enrolled students have any pre-existing safeguarding concerns from previous schools.

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- ☐ The school has a system in place for forwarding existing safeguarding concerns to a student's next school.
- ☐ The school considers a major safeguarding allegation as part of Executive Risk Management plans.
- ☐ Stakeholders of the school's community, including students and the Board/Owners, are part of developing and reviewing the organization's safeguarding policy.

4. Communications

Level 1

- ☐ The school has a child safeguarding and protection commitment statement that is user-friendly for children and the entire school community. The statement:
 - Clearly outlines the school's position regarding the provision of a safe school environment
 - References cooperation with the greater community
 - Is translated into other languages that promote understanding within your community
 - Is published as widely as possible in places such as:
 - School website
 - Email signatures
 - Parent/student/staff handbooks
 - Hallways and offices
 - Newsletters
- ☐ The school's approach and commitment to safeguarding is highly visible on the school's website.
- ☐ The school makes visible any safeguarding certification/recognition from external agencies.
- ☐ The Safeguarding Committee and contact information is visible and easily accessible throughout the school.
- ☐ The school sends an annual introductory letter to the school community that includes the child protection commitment statement and clearly outlines the key points of your child protection program. The letter is translated, as necessary, and shared with all families in the school community.
 - Consider a system for receipt confirmation to track readership
- ☐ There is a system in place for making sure families and legal guardians are aware of the school's policies, practices and procedures.

Level 2

- ☐ There are posters/visuals around the school that convey the school's commitment to safeguarding.

Level 3

- ☐ The school maintains a stock of holding letters for immediate responses to potential crisis situations.

5. Professional Development

Level 1

- ☐ Safeguarding training for all-staff (anyone who works with children: faculty, cafeteria workers, bus drivers, cleaners, volunteers, coaches, etc.) is conducted annually (see GSC example [HERE](#)). Attendance is mandatory and documented.

Topics for training may include:

- Definitions of abuse, neglect, and bullying
- Possible indicators of abuse, neglect, and bullying
- Myths and facts about abuse and neglect
- Professional boundaries
- Procedures for handling disclosures and reporting concerns
- Roles and responsibilities of the Safeguarding Committee & Response Teams
- Possible actions once a report is received
- Whistleblower protection
- Code of Conduct
- Safeguarding [scenarios](#)

- ☐ The school maintains a record of safeguarding professional development.
- ☐ There is an well-established induction process that outlines the school's safeguarding framework for new teachers

Level 2

- ☐ DSL(s) receive advanced level safeguarding training.
- ☐ The School Board/Owners receive safeguarding training.
- ☐ The school collects, analyses, and uses data to plan for future faculty/staff safeguarding training.

Level 3

- ☐ The school performs annual safeguarding audits, whether self-audits or through external agencies.

6. Responding to Allegations

Level 1

- ☐ The school regularly communicates to students and employees how to report harm.
- ☐ A system is in place for responding to harm allegations; this system is written down in the form of a flowchart or checklist for clarity and is known to all stakeholders.
- ☐ The school has a clear reporting pathway for sharing safeguarding concerns within the community.

- ☐ This system involves a team of individuals with roles that can specifically address safeguarding, social-emotional, and institutional response needs in every situation.
- ☐ Individuals from the Safeguarding Response Team have undergone beginning safeguarding training and are familiar with best practices in schools.
- ☐ The school understands their reporting and responding responsibilities under local laws pertaining to child welfare and other potential criminal allegations.
- ☐ The school has a secure method for documenting the concern/allegation and any follow-up actions.
- ☐ The school has trusted external sources they can consult with when needed.
- ☐ CPOs/DSLs are familiar with local laws concerning safeguarding.

Level 2

- ☐ The school has protocols in place that differentiate response actions for different types of allegations: employee-to-student harm, non-employee (e.g. parent)-to-student harm, child-to-child harm.
- ☐ The school's procedures include protocols for responding to low-level employee concerns.
- ☐ The school uses a single, centralized, confidential, and secure system for recording and documenting safeguarding concerns or allegations.
- ☐ Individuals from the Safeguarding Response Team have undergone advanced level training for safeguarding in schools that includes trauma-informed care.
- ☐ The school has trusted referral sources for students and/or families in need that consider culture, language, gender, cost and any other relevant needs.
- ☐ There is support and resources for new training with new hires.

Level 3

- ☐ Individuals responsible for interviewing students after a disclosure are trained in child-friendly or child forensic interviewing techniques.
- ☐ Trauma-informed care actions are referenced throughout procedural documents and Safeguarding Response Team is adhering to best trauma-informed care practices.
- ☐ There is a process for reviewing difficult and complicated cases to enable the Safeguarding Response Team to learn and improve.
- ☐ There is a written understanding of what cases would be reported to the Board/Owners and by whom.
- ☐ There are successful outreach actions to maintain partnerships with local child welfare agencies, law enforcement, Embassies/High Commissions, and trusted referral sources.
- ☐ The school offers a variety of clear reporting pathways, which could include anonymous reporting systems for sharing safeguarding concerns within the community.

7. Curriculum

Level 1

- ☐ Key staff members have received professional development with regard to developing child protection/safeguarding curriculum.
- ☐ Students are annually informed, in a developmentally appropriate way, of the school's commitment to safeguarding.

Level 2

- ☐ The school has a plan for implementing a child protection curriculum for all age levels.
 - Please note: this one must be Level 2 – a curriculum should not be put in place until the school is ready to receive reports and disclosures.
- ☐ CPOs/DSLs are familiar with local safeguarding helplines.

Level 3

- ☐ The school's curriculum includes a Wellness/Personal, Social, and Health Education (PSHE) component that explicitly educates students about Child Protection and safeguarding and is embedded into year-long conversations, morning meetings, core values, etc.

8. Extracurricular Programs

Level 1

- ☐ Clear recruitment protocols for hiring all extracurricular staff (onsite coaches, specialists) exist that align with [Category 2](#) (Recruitment) expectations.
- ☐ The school conducts a similar onboarding process for extracurricular staff as it does for full-time staff hires, which includes an in-person meeting with the DSL/CPO.
- ☐ The school conducts annual student safeguarding training and code of conduct acknowledgment for all extracurricular staff.
- ☐ Extracurricular staff know and understand how to use the school's safeguarding reporting process.
- ☐ The school follows a clear and detailed trip planning process for any off-campus activities.
- ☐ Clear chaperone guidelines and expectations exist for all off-campus trips, including communication between students, staff, and parents.

Level 2

- ☐ All extracurricular staff (onsite coaches, specialists) are first aid/CPR/AED trained.

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- ☐ The school has a system in place for extracurricular staff to access health risks and demographic details for students they supervise.
- ☐ The school conducts risk assessments for off-site locations where students visit for field trips.
- ☐ All service providers undergo a verification process that includes the school's student safeguarding expectations.
- ☐ The school assigns an administrator to be in charge (AIC) on athletic trips where adult chaperones are also team coaches.

Level 3

- ☐ The school's risk assessment process for off-campus trips includes site visits of all locations and activities students will be traveling and/or staying.
- ☐ The school shares its campus risk assessment with visiting schools.
- ☐ Risk Assessment protocols are reviewed yearly.
- ☐ All service provider contracts include detailed school behavior and professional expectations.

9. Parents/Community

Level 1

- ☐ Information sessions about safeguarding are provided for parents and guardians.
- ☐ The safeguarding policy is shared with parents annually in the school's main language(s).
- ☐ Visitors and Volunteers to campus review a Visitor & Volunteer Code of Conduct prior to entering campus. Both wear a specific identifying piece to designate them as non-faculty.
- ☐ [GSC Visitor/Volunteer Examples](#)

Level 2

- ☐ Procedures are shared with parents so that they can submit safeguarding concerns to DSLs at school.
- ☐ The school considers whether child protection is included in the school's DEI/Anti-discrimination policies in line with local laws.
- ☐ School representatives meet with the Regional Security Officers (RSOs) of any appropriate embassy to identify:
 - What is their experience with Child Protection and when do they want to be involved?
 - If the US Embassy is willing to be part of your Safeguarding Committee or Response Team?
- ☐ The school conducts mapping exercises during which it contacts local agencies for help in researching local laws, upholding local laws, and creating a network of child safeguarding resources. Potential contacts include:
 - Local law enforcement
 - Embassies
 - Legal system

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- Child protection agencies
- Forensic personnel
- UNICEF
- Local Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)
- Mental health providers and resources.

☐ School representatives meet with local law enforcement (and/or RSOs) to discuss:

- Who should be contacted if the school needs support with a CP report
- How this person should be contacted
- Their expected responses in certain scenarios, like:
 - ☐ What if one student raped another student?
 - ☐ What if a parent physically abused a child?
 - ☐ What if a parent emotionally abused a child?
 - ☐ What if a teacher abused a child?
 - ☐ What if one child physically abused another child?
 - ☐ What if a student were caught using illegal drugs?

10. Facilities

Level 1

- ☐ Learning spaces, along with offices, storage rooms, and common use areas, allow for a clear line of sight.
- ☐ There are separate toilets for adults and children and are clearly labeled.
- ☐ Paper shredders are available for the shredding of confidential documents.

Level 2

- ☐ CPOs/DSLs conduct regular facility 'walkthroughs' reviewing potential safeguarding risks with a focus specifically on facilities.
- ☐ CCTV cameras are installed in key risk areas (when financially possible) and signs posted.
- ☐ Early childhood toilets are specifically designed and built for small children.
- ☐ Health clinics have separate exam/treatment spaces that are out of view of the public.

Level 3

- ☐ All computer monitors used to access student data to have privacy screen protectors



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11. Action Planning/Auditing

- ☐ The school has a long term (2-5 year) Action Plan in place for improving the school's safeguarding framework and practices.
 - [AISA Safe Schools Self-Audit Tool](#)
 - [International Task Force on Child Protection \(ICMEC\): Expectations for School Environmental Audit Tool \(ICMEC\)](#)