



BISHOP MACKENZIE
INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL

Safeguarding: Child Protection

www.bmis.mw

TABLE OF CONTENTS

An Important Note for the School Community	3
Statement on Child Protection	4
Definition of Terms	5
Myths and Realities of Child Abuse	7
Responding to Suspected Child Abuse	9
What Happens After Suspected Abuse or Neglect is Reported?	10
Screening	11
Curriculum	12
Relational Aggression	12
Self Harm	13
Suicide	15
Resources	17

AN IMPORTANT NOTE FOR THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY

Dear BMIS Community,

Bishop Mackenzie International School recognizes that child protection and welfare considerations permeate all aspects of school life and must be reflected in each of the school's policies, practices, and activities.

The BMIS Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy is based on international and local Malawi law and on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child of which Malawi is a signatory. These two key articles from the U.N Convention on the Rights of the Child are important and we wish to draw your attention to them:

Article 19 - Protection from abuse and neglect

The State shall protect the child from all forms of maltreatment by parents or others responsible for the care of the child and establish appropriate social programs for the prevention of abuse and the treatment of victims.

Article 34 - Sexual exploitation

The State shall protect children from sexual exploitation and abuse, including prostitution and involvement in pornography.

By enrolling your child at BMIS, you agree to work in partnership with the school and abide by the policies adopted by the school. We genuinely value our partnership with you in providing for the safety and care of your children. It is for this reason that BMIS has endorsed a Child Protection Policy that defines the standards by which all our students should be treated with respect and dignity at all times.

As part of our overall educational programs and specific to our shared responsibility to educate children and to ensure a safe environment in which all children can learn and grow, BMIS will:

- Provide age-appropriate lessons for all grade levels to help students understand personal safety, needs, and rights.
- Provide parent materials and information sessions to help you better understand our programs and procedures.
- Annually train faculty and staff to recognize and report issues of abuse and neglect.

Working together at home and at school, we will ensure that our children are safe and knowledgeable about their rights and responsibilities to themselves and to each other so they can grow and learn free of fear in a safe and supportive environment.

I thank you for your support of our efforts and invite you to contact the school counsellors or principals regarding any specific questions you may have in this regard.

Sincerely,
Adrian Moody
Director

Statement on Child Protection

Bishop Mackenzie International School recognises students may potentially be the victims of any form of abuse or neglect. Because of its continuing concern for the health and welfare of all BMIS students, the school established guidelines and procedures to be established by the school's administration.

Child abuse and neglect are concerns throughout the world. Child abuse and neglect are violations of a child's human rights and are obstacles to the child's education as well as to their physical, emotional, and social development. BMIS endorses the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, of which our host country, Malawi, is a signatory.

Schools fill a special institutional role in society as protectors of children. Schools need to ensure that all children in their care are afforded a safe and secure environment in which to grow and develop, both at school and away. Educators, having the opportunity to observe and interact with children over time, are in a unique position to identify children who are in need of help and protection. As such, educators have a professional and ethical obligation to identify children who are in need of help and protection and to take steps to ensure that the child and family avail themselves of the services needed to remedy any situation that constitutes child abuse or neglect.

All staff at BMIS must report suspected incidents of child abuse or neglect whenever the staff member has reasonable cause to believe that a child has suffered or is at significant risk of suffering abuse or neglect. Reporting and follow up of all suspected incidents of child abuse or neglect will proceed in accordance with administrative regulations respective to our guidelines and procedures. Furthermore, cases of suspected child abuse or neglect may be reported to the appropriate employer, to the respective consulate in Malawi, to the appropriate child protection agency in the home country, and/or to local authorities.

BMIS seeks to be a safe haven for students who may be experiencing abuse or neglect in any aspect of their lives. As such, BMIS will distribute this document annually to all parents and applicants, will communicate these guidelines and procedures annually to students, will provide training for all staff, and will make every effort to implement hiring practices.

Definition of Terms:

Child Abuse - According to the World Health Organization, 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.” A person may abuse a child by inflicting harm, or by failing to act to prevent harm.

Physical Abuse - may involve hitting, punching, shaking, throwing, poisoning, biting, burning or scalding, drowning, suffocating, or otherwise causing intentional physical harm to a child.

Possible signs of physical abuse

- Bruises, burns, sprains, dislocations, bites, cuts
- Improbable excuses are given to explain injuries
- Injuries that have not received medical attention
- Injuries that occur to the body in places that are not normally exposed to falls, rough games, etc.
- Repeated urinary infections or unexplained stomach pains
- Refusal to discuss injuries
- Withdrawal from physical contact
- Arms and legs kept covered in hot weather
- Fear of returning home or of parents being contacted
- Showing wariness or distrust of adults
- Self-destructive tendencies
- Being aggressive towards others
- Being very passive and compliant
- Chronic running away

Emotional abuse - is the persistent emotional ill treatment of a child so as to cause severe and adverse effects on a child’s emotional development. It may involve: conveying to children that they are worthless or unloved; that they are inadequate or valued only insofar as they meet the needs of another person; age or developmentally inappropriate expectations or corruption of children. Some level of emotional abuse is involved in all types of ill-treatment of a child, though it may also occur alone.

Possible signs of emotional abuse

- Physical, mental, and emotional development is delayed
- Highly anxious
- Showing delayed speech or sudden speech disorder
- Fear of new situations
- Low self-esteem
- Inappropriate emotional responses to painful situations
- Extremes of passivity or aggression
- Drug or alcohol abuse
- Chronic running away
- Compulsive stealing
- Obsessions or phobias
- Sudden under-achievement or lack of concentration
- Attention-seeking behavior
- Persistent tiredness
- Lying

Sexual abuse - involves forcing or enticing a child to take part in sexual activities, whether or not the child is aware of what is happening. The activities may involve physical contact, including penetrative (i.e. rape) or non-penetrative acts. They may include non-contact activities, such as involving children in the production or viewing of pornographic material or encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways. Children involved in commercial sex work are victims of sexual abuse, whether they perceive themselves as victims or not.

Possible signs of sexual abuse

- Pain or irritation to the genital area
- Vaginal or penile discharge
- Difficulty with urination
- Infection, bleeding
- STDs
- Fear of people or places
- Aggression
- Regressive behaviours, bed wetting or stranger anxiety
- Excessive masturbation
- Sexually provocative
- Stomach pains or discomfort walking or sitting
- Being unusually quiet and withdrawn or unusually aggressive
- Suffering from what seem physical ailments that can't be explained medically
- Showing fear or distrust of a particular adult
- Mentioning receiving special attention from an adult or a new "secret" friendship with an adult or young person
- Refusal to continue with school or usual social activities
- Age inappropriate sexualized behavior or language

Neglect - is the persistent failure to meet a child's basic physical or physiological needs, likely to result in serious impairment of the child's health or development.

Some possible indicators of neglect

- Medical needs unattended
- Lack of supervision
- Consistent hunger
- Inappropriate dress
- Inadequate nutrition
- Fatigue or listlessness
- Self-destructive behaviour
- Extreme loneliness
- Extreme need for affection
- Failure to grow
- Poor personal hygiene
- Frequent lateness or non-attendance at school
- Low self-esteem
- Poor social relationships
- Compulsive stealing
- Drug or alcohol abuse

Commonly held myths vs the realities about child abuse and neglect

MYTHS

- **Child abuse is carried out by strangers.**
- **Learning about child protection is harmful to your children.**
- **Abuse education is sex education.**
- **Abuse is a matter of culture; physical or sexual abuse falls within the norms of some cultures and is acceptable.**
- **Child abuse is a result of poverty and happens in low socioeconomic circumstances.**
- **International Schools do not have to report abuse to local authorities.**

FACTS

- Research indicates that 90% of abuse is committed by individuals known to the child. International school communities tend to have families that move often and are separated from their extended families in their home-of-record. When abuse is within the family, the transient lifestyle then increases the risk to international school students who tend not to have access to outside resources, and therefore cannot get help.
- Research indicates that developmentally appropriate education makes children more confident and able to react to dangerous situations. Teaching using a specific population context increases protective behavior.
- Research-based programs prepare students to develop the skills and attitudes to keep themselves safe from perpetrators, and behaviors that include bullying, harassment, and other forms of exploitation.
- The reality is that there is no excuse for child abuse! No culture supports intentionally harming children.
- Research indicates that child abuse occurs in all racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, and cultural sectors of society. A common characteristic of an abusive family is isolation, such as that commonly found in our international school families who move often or are separated from their extended families at home.
- International schools are bound by the laws of the host country and as such international schools must be knowledgeable and compliant with the child protection laws in their locale. Furthermore, international schools are legally and ethically liable for any violation of existing laws related to reporting of cases of abuse or neglect.

Responsibilities of the Safeguarding Lead

The school will identify one named person designated as the safeguarding lead to support the director and principals. The safeguarding lead/s will: receive appropriate safeguarding training to equip them to undertake their role; be given sufficient time in the working day to undertake the role, and be able to prioritize safeguarding when necessary.

This role is guided by two principles:

- The welfare of the student is always paramount.
- Confidentiality should be respected as far as is reasonably possible.

Being guided by these principles, the safeguarding lead will:

- Play a key role in ensuring that the school takes action to support any student who may be at risk
- Make sure that all staff (both teaching and non-teaching) are aware of their responsibilities in relation to safeguarding and child protection, with the support of the director and principals
- Have appropriate training in addition to the basic training that all other staff receive
- Collate and keep accurate and confidential records of any concerns about students
- Ensure that the entire school community knows who the safeguarding lead is in their setting or if being supported remotely during a COVID outbreak, who is providing this support and how to contact them
- Be familiar with local regulations, procedures, and agencies that can offer support for safeguarding matters
- Coordinating with other safeguarding leads in student transfers

Responsibilities of the Child Protection Team

Purpose: To support the SL in creating a school culture that embodies an ethos of protection.

Who is part of the CPT:

- Safeguarding Lead
- A vertical child protection team, usually no more than 5, that may include representatives from HR, counseling/pastoral, ICT, medical, athletics, teacher reps, support staff, etc.



Responding to Suspected Child Abuse

The following is information provided to all staff members in the BMIS Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy.

Take action when...

- A child discloses to you information indicating abuse or neglect.
- A child has non-accidental injuries or an explanation that is inconsistent with the injuries that lead you to suspect abuse.
- A third person discloses information that gives you a reason to believe abuse or neglect has occurred.

If a child reports abuse to you, or if you see unexplained injuries on a child: ask these four questions to ascertain what occurred. You are not responsible for investigating.

- **What happened?**
- **Who did this to you?**
- **Where were you when this happened?**
- **When did this happen?**

Key duties:

Meet regularly to review progress related to the implementation of the school's child protection policies/ programme, including, for example:

- staff training,
- parent engagement,
- student education & awareness campaigns,
- annually review all child protection policies and provide recommendations to the school leadership as to how to strengthen these.

review anonymized cases, including responses, to inform school policies, to ensure consistency of approach, and for training purposes

- receive and report to the SL low-level concerns about adults in school
- implement (or support) safety plans as needed

Sub-committees may be established for a specific role and duration (eg. to review a child protection policy or supplemental policies).

Where there is cause to suspect child abuse or neglect, it is the responsibility of the staff member to report their suspicions to the division principal in all cases. The relevant division principal is the Child Protection Officer in all cases. It is the responsibility of the principal to inform the head of the school of the suspected case of child abuse or neglect.

All school personnel is mandated to report incidences and suspicions of abuse and neglect to the safeguarding lead. All reports of abuse and neglect must be made to the safeguarding lead immediately or as soon as possible. The safeguarding team will work together to plan the next steps.

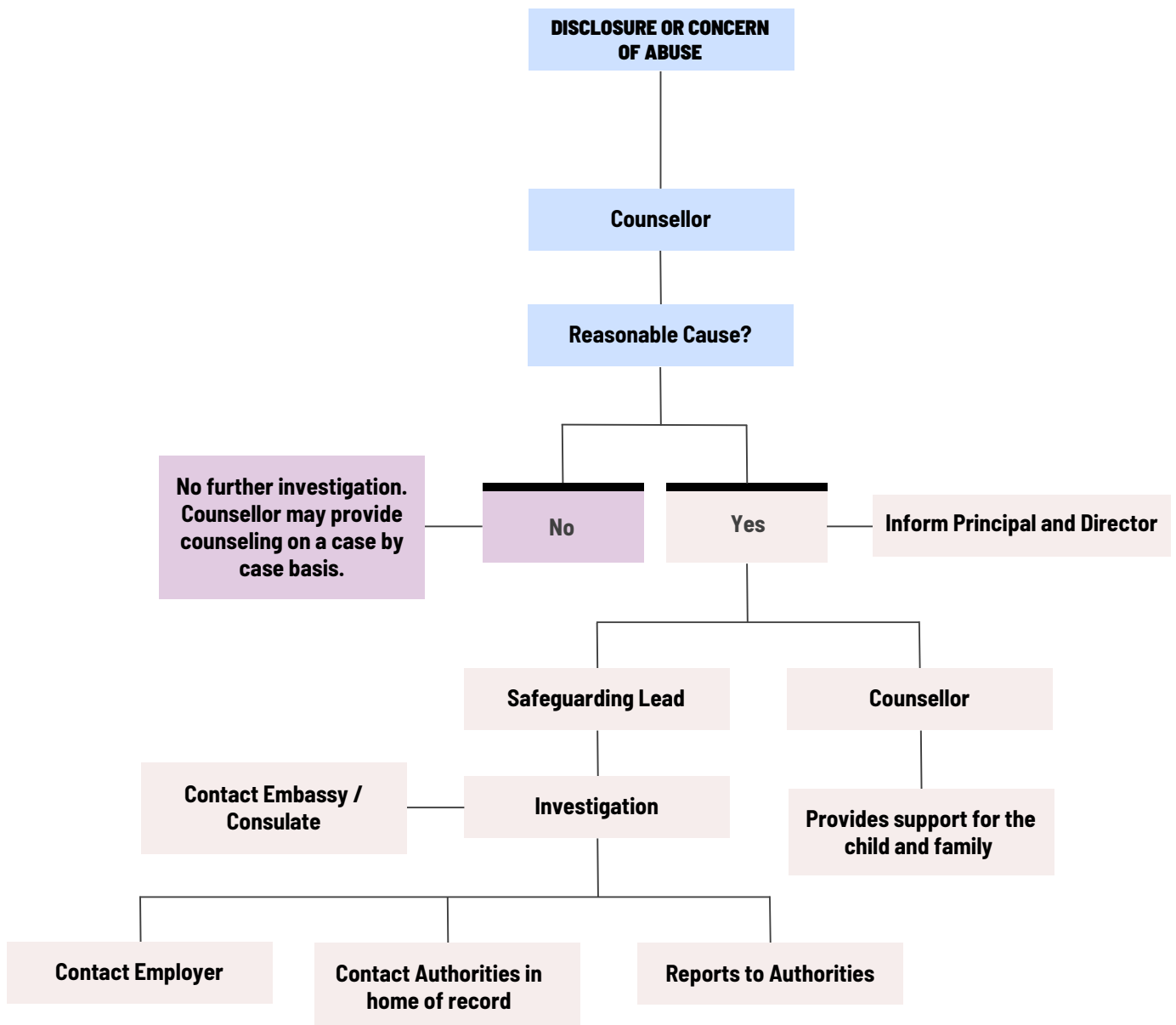
If a third party reports abuse to you

- If the third party is an adult, it is their obligation to report the suspicion to the authorities.
- If the third party is another child, refer them to the principal or counsellors.

What happens after suspected abuse or neglect is reported?

Where there is cause to suspect child abuse or neglect, it is the responsibility of staff members to report their suspicions to the counselor, or to the principal. It is the responsibility of the principal to inform the director of the suspected case of child abuse or neglect.

All staff, faculty, and administrators are mandated to report incidences of abuse and neglect. All BMIS employees are also required to report suspicion of abuse or neglect. All reports of abuse and neglect must be made to the counsellor within 48 hours for immediate response.



BMIS recognises the presence of dual relationships within our community. In the event of a conflict of interest, the team member will not be involved in the case.

Documentation of reported or disclosed cases of abuse

All suspected or reported cases of abuse or neglect will be documented by the school and confidentially stored. Information may be shared within the professional community as necessary.

Child protection follows the child, especially when the problem is within the family; thus we are morally obligated to do as much as we can to help the next community protect the child/youth. This may include making contact with the next school.

What if the suspected offender works for the school?

When a child discloses to someone about inappropriate behaviors of school personnel, the school will respond no differently than if the alleged offender is a family member. All allegations will be taken seriously and investigated. Depending on the severity of the allegation, the incident may be dealt with internally or referred to outside authorities. The safety of our students is paramount in this situation.

The following actions will be taken in the event of an allegation:

- The school will investigate the incident immediately.
- The school will inform the child's parents immediately.
- Depending on the severity of the allegation, the teacher or employee may be placed on leave while further investigations are taking place.

If the allegation is found to be false, the school will offer support and counselling to the accused. If found to be true, the matter will be dealt with by the authorities.

Screening

The first and most effective means of preventing child abuse is screening out potential abusers before they come to the school. It is a reasonable expectation that all children who come on to our campus will be afforded the same protection that we provide to our students.

All BMIS personnel, staff, teachers, and coaches whose potential employment involves direct contact with, and/or the potential for unmonitored access to children are given thorough reference and background checks, including a review of criminal and sexual offender records. It is a requirement that outside service providers (including security guards, catering and cleaning companies, and other activity providers) will sign an agreement as part of their contract with the school, confirming that they will inform their employees of our policies and ensure compliance.

BMIS reserves the right to conduct background screening of employees at any time after employment has begun – and will do so periodically. Any misrepresentations, falsifications, or material omissions in the information provided, whenever discovered, may result in termination of employment with the organization.

Curriculum

Bishop Mackenzie International School provides Reception to Year 13, developmentally appropriate personal safety programme as part of the curriculum. Counsellors are the primary facilitators of this program, however, PHE teachers, Tutors, and classroom teachers will also be trained to deliver aspects of this programme. All parents and school personnel will be regularly informed of the content as it is being taught.

Relational Aggression: Peer on Peer Abuse

Definition of relational aggression:

Relational aggression is defined as a type of aggression that is "intended to harm others through deliberate manipulation of their social standing and relationships".

Behavior directed towards harming or destroying another's friendships, isolating others from a peer group, and social ostracising or rejection.

Examples of relational aggression:

- Examples of relational aggression:
- Spreading rumours
- Gossiping (privately and publicly)
- Overt and/or subtle exclusive behaviours
- Intentionally cruel language and/or facial gestures
- Teasing (particularly about one's physical appearance)
- Hurtful commenting on social media
- Sharing of potentially embarrassing pictures online without the permission of the subject of the picture (Emphasis should not be on the person who took the picture of themselves (often a victim) but on the wrongdoing of the person who shared the photo.)

How do we safeguard our students:

- Learn vocabulary: relational aggression, backstabbing, manipulation, gossip, exclusion
- Teach about hurtful behaviour and what leads to it: recognise that aggression is caused by fear and anger - what are healthy ways of channelling these feelings?
- Teach conflict resolution skills
- Teach about behaviour online
- Adopt a "help, don't hurt" strategy
- Provide positive role models
- Teach communication skills online and off
- Stress assertiveness, not aggressiveness
- Learn conflict resolution skills
- Identify alternatives to bullying behaviour
- Teach empathy
- Teach about sexual abuse
- Train students Active Bystander intervention
- Teach students to be upstanders, distractors, supporters



How to identify a student who is being abused by their peers:

Note that abuse affects children very differently. Rather than checking behaviour against a list, be alert to changes that might cause concern.

- Disengagement from classes or struggling to carry out school-related tasks to the standard ordinarily expected.
- Failure to attend school
- Physical injuries
- Experiencing difficulties with mental health and/or emotional wellbeing
- Becoming withdrawn and or shy, experiencing headaches, stomach aches, anxiety or panic attacks, nightmares or difficulty/too much sleep
- Changes in appearance and/or starting to act in a non-age-appropriate way
- Abusive behavior towards others



Responding to concerns or allegations:

- Thorough investigation
- Treat all children involved as potentially at risk

Self Harm

Self-injury is any deliberate, non-suicidal behavior that inflicts physical harm on the body and is aimed at relieving emotional distress. It can include but is not limited to, cutting, burning, banging and bruising, non-suicidal overdose, and even deliberate bone-breaking.

Risk factors associated with self-injury:

- Low self-esteem
- Perfectionism
- Mental health issues such as depression and anxiety
- The onset of a more complicated mental illness such as schizophrenia, bi-polar disorder or a personality disorder
- Problems at home or school
- Physical, emotional or sexual abuse
- Possible physical signs of self-injury
- Obvious cuts, scratches or burns that do not appear of an accidental nature
- Frequent 'accidents' that cause physical injury
- Regularly bandaged arms and / or wrists
- Reluctance to take part in physical exercise or other activities that require a change of clothes
- Wearing long sleeves and trousers even during hot weather.

Self Harm and Suicide

Although self-injury is non-suicidal behavior and relied on as an attempt to cope and manage, it must be recognized that the emotional distress that leads to self-injury can also lead to suicidal thoughts and actions. It is therefore of utmost importance that all incidents of self-injury are taken seriously and that the underlying issues and emotional distress are thoroughly investigated and necessary emotional support is given, in order to minimize any greater risk.

What happens after self-harm has been suspected or reported?

If a student reports self-harm to a teacher or staff member:

- The teacher listens in a kind, calm and non-judgemental manner teacher should use “I” statements, e.g. “I am concerned about you,” or “I am worried about you”, or “I will help you find someone who can help you.”
- Teachers should not question the student about why they have harmed themselves, or ask to see old wounds, or question the student about how they wound themselves
- The teacher explains to the student that it is his/her responsibility to report student’s behavior to counsellor and principal to help the student receive support that is needed and keep student safe
- The teacher should accompany the student to the principal/counsellor/nurse/find someone to bring one of these people to them
- In the case of an acutely distressed student, the immediate safety of the student is paramount and an adult should remain with the student at all times
- A student should be taken to the nurse for medical treatment if they have open wounds and the instrument used to self-harm should be removed

If a report of self-harm has been made, the counsellor will gather further information and decide on the best course of action.

This could include:

- Providing support for child and family within the school
- Provision of community and web-based resources to child and parents, for understanding and addressing self-injury.
- Family meeting
- Outside referral for support and/or counselling
- A request for the release of information to the school so that an appointed person may communicate with any outside professionals who are assisting the student.

Note: When determining a course of action, the student will be involved as an active participant in each step.

The following will be made clear to a self-harming student:

- self-injury is a way of coping with emotional pain, and therefore it is helpful to work with a counsellor to find other ways of coping
- the student is asked not to self injure at school and not to openly display new or old wounds
- the student should not talk graphically to other students about their injuries or describe methods used.

Note: When determining a course of action, the student will be involved as an active participant in each step.

The following will be made clear to a self-harming student:

- self-injury is a way of coping with emotional pain, and therefore it is helpful to work with a counsellor to find other ways of coping
- the student is asked not to self injure at school and not to openly display new or old wounds
- the student should not talk graphically to other students about their injuries or describe methods used.

Self-harm prevention:

The school does not teach lessons or hold assemblies explicitly about self-harm. Instead, we will educate students about signs of distress in themselves and others, as well as teach about positive coping skills. Students will be educated that by seeking help and advice for a friend who is in distress, they are taking responsible action and being a good friend and that their friend will be treated in a caring and supportive manner. The peer group of a person who self-harms may value the opportunity to speak with the school counsellor.

Suicide

Suicide refers to the deliberate taking of one's life. Suicidal behavior includes the spectrum of activities related to suicide, including suicidal thinking (ideation) and suicide attempts. Some people include risk-taking behaviors in which there is some risk of immediate or later self-harm (eg. self-harming substance use).

BMIS is committed to the creation of a school environment that helps to build protective factors within our students and school community that will reduce the risk of a student resorting to suicidal behavior. This includes activities, policies, and programs that help to build:

- Connectedness - a sense of belonging with others and connectedness to our school and community.
- Resilience - the development of capacities within a person that promote positive outcomes, including personal coping skills and strategies for dealing with adversity, such as problem-solving, communication and social skills, optimistic thinking, and help-seeking.
- A sense of personal safety - through the implementation of anti-bullying commitments and agreements. Students are taught that it is right to seek support for a friend that they fear may be at risk of suicide.

Suicide Ideation and Reports:

The school will NOT ignore and will follow up immediately on:

- any student, parent, or faculty “rumours” about a possible suicide attempt
- any suicide notes/emails/messages communicated to peers, faculty, and staff by students.

If a student verbally reports suicide ideation to a teacher or staff member:

- teacher listens in a kind and calm manner
- teacher should use “I” statements, e.g. “I am concerned about you,” or “I am worried about you”, or “I will help you find someone who can help you.”
- teacher explains to student that it is his/her responsibility to report student’s situation to the counsellor and principal to help the student receive the support that is needed and keep the student safe
- the immediate safety of the student is paramount and an adult should remain with the student at all times
- teacher should accompany the student to principal/counsellor/nurse/find someone to bring one of these people to them

If a student sends a suicide ideation note, email, or message to a teacher or staff member, the teacher or staff member MUST contact the principal or counselor immediately.

- If, after following up on notes or rumours, a student is found safe in the school, the counsellor will meet with them immediately to assess their well-being and the background of the suicide concern.
- The information will be shared with the student’s parents with the recommendation of referral to an outside mental health provider if one is not already involved.
- Regular contact and communication with the student to check on their health and well-being will commence.

Attempted Suicide:

If a student has attempted suicide and is deemed ready to return to school, the school will work closely with the student, family and any involved mental health professionals, to support the student upon their return. This would include the development of a Student Safety and Support Plan that outlines:

- regular contact and communication with the student to check on their health and well-being
- any flexible timetable arrangements that may be needed and for what length of time activities, plans and goals to assist the student's well-being at school
- people the student can talk to and their locations.

The student is an active participant in the development of this plan.

Other members of the school:

- Support will also be available to any teachers, staff and friends of the student if they would like or need it as the welfare of the community is paramount.
- Particular attention is also paid to identifying any other at-risk students.

School Response Protocol:

- In the event of either an attempted or completed suicide, the school has a comprehensive school response protocol to follow that guides the immediate response to the incident and the restoration of well-being in the school community.

Resources:

Association of International Schools in Africa, Child Protection Handbook, March 2020.

The International School of the Sacred Heart, Child Protection Policy, August 2020.

Self-Harm Policy: A Model Policy for Use in Schools / Colleges.

Cornell Research Program on Self-Injury and Recovery, K. Bublick, J. Goodman & J. Whitlock.

Guidelines to Assist in Responding to Attempted Suicide or Suicide by a Student. Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, Victoria, Australia