



ALTAMIRA
INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL

CHILD PROTECTION

HANDBOOK

2023 - 2024

AIS



September 1st 2023
Version: 2



AN IMPORTANT NOTE FOR PARENTS REGARDING CHILD PROTECTION.....	3
INTRODUCTION.....	5
DEFINITIONS AND INDICATORS OF ABUSE.....	7
Physical Abuse:.....	7
Emotional Abuse:.....	7
Sexual Abuse:.....	8
Neglect:.....	9
Confidentiality.....	10
WHAT TO DO IF A CHILD DISCLOSES ABUSE:.....	10
WHAT TO DO WHEN SUSPECTING CASES OF ABUSE:.....	11
Step 1 - Receiving A Report & Gathering Initial Information:.....	11
Step 2 - After Initial Investigation:.....	12
Step 3 - Follow-Up:.....	12



AN IMPORTANT NOTE FOR PARENTS REGARDING CHILD PROTECTION

Dear Parents,

Ensuring the safety and well-being of our students is of utmost importance at Altamira International School (AIS). To uphold this commitment, AIS has implemented a comprehensive Child Protection Policy. This policy serves as a guiding framework for both our staff and families, addressing essential aspects related to the care, safety, and health of our students.

Our AIS Child Protection Policy is based on US and Colombian law as well as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child of which the US and Colombia are signatories.

Two key articles of the Convention which guide our work related to protecting our children are:

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.

Sexual exploitation

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

The AIS strongly supports and upholds this policy. We highly value our collaborative partnership with parents to establish a secure and nurturing environment conducive to the growth and learning of our students. Our commitment is unwavering in ensuring that the school remains free from instances of child abuse, neglect, and bullying, while concurrently upholding and respecting the rights of every child.

By enrolling your child at Altamira International School, it is understood that you agree to adhere to both children's law and our comprehensive Child Protection Policy. Recognizing that child protection and well-being are collective responsibilities, we urge parents to promptly report any suspicions



of child abuse or neglect concerning our students by contacting the division counselor.

As an integral component of our Child Protection Program and overarching curriculum, AIS is dedicated to providing the following:

- Age-appropriate lessons for students at all grade levels, designed to foster an understanding of personal safety and individual rights.
- Information sessions for parents, equipping you with a deeper understanding of our Child Protection Policy.
- Comprehensive training for all staff members to recognize and appropriately report any instances of child abuse or neglect.

We genuinely value your support for this initiative. If you have any questions, we are ready and available to address them.

Sincerely,

The Altamira International School



INTRODUCTION

As a community of education, Altamira International School recognizes the responsibility to guarantee the welfare of those under our care. Child abuse and indifference are violations of a child's human rights and are obstacles to the child's physical, emotional, and mental development. International school communities are particularly vulnerable to abuse because the nature of abuse often requires secrecy, isolation, and limited access to support resources. As a school community, we have a duty to take strong and dedicated measures to address this reality.

The Altamira International School is committed to promoting a safe and secure environment by protecting all children in our care. In order to achieve this goal, we will respond with a sense of urgency whenever a child is a victim or is at risk of becoming a victim. Educators have the opportunity to observe and interact with children over time and are in a unique position to identify children who may need help and protection. The school must take the appropriate 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 faculty and staff must report suspected incidences of child abuse or neglect. Reporting and follow-up of all suspected incidences of child abuse or neglect will proceed in accordance with a regularly updated Altamira International School Child Protection Policy. It is also expected that any adult visitor or volunteer at Altamira International School will report any suspected cases to the administration immediately.

To ensure the protection of all children at Altamira International School from abuse, exploitation, and neglect, the school administration has implemented comprehensive child protection policies and procedures, encompassing the following:

- **Disciplinary Policy:** A clear disciplinary policy applicable to all members of the Altamira International School community.
- **Social Media Policies:** Guidelines outlining expectations for healthy interactions among all members of our school community on social media.
- **Professional Boundaries:** Policies defining and maintaining professional boundaries for faculty, staff, and other members.



- **Shared Definitions and Understandings:** Clear definitions and understandings related to child abuse.
- **Training and Education:** Ongoing training and education on child protection for students, families, faculty, and staff.
- **Screening and Selection:** Diligent screening and selection processes for all new and existing staff, faculty, and volunteers.
- **Protocols for Comprehensive Assistance:** Protocols and procedures for the implementation of the "Ruta de Atención Integral para la Convivencia Escolar" (procedures for the comprehensive assistance in matters related to violation of human, sexual, and reproductive rights in boys and girls in the educational environment).

Child protection is a complex issue involving dynamics at the levels of the child, the family, and the community. This Child Protection Policy is designed to respond at all three levels:

The Community:

At-risk communities may have limited law enforcement regarding child protection, high parental work stress, acceptance of inappropriate behavior towards children (excessive corporal punishment), and unusually high expectations for children's achievements. Altamira International School strictly implements the CHILD PROTECTION POLICY, providing training to teachers and staff to recognize abuse, counseling support for children and families, and guidance for parents in adopting protective behaviors. The school also networks with community and health services for holistic referrals and collaborates with local authorities.

The Family:

At-risk families may experience parental stress, perceived lack of support and access to resources, social isolation, unusually high expectations for children, and a history of inappropriate discipline. Colegio Internacional Altamira collaborates with parents to understand appropriate discipline methods, engages with community and health services, and educates parents on child protection practices.

The Child:

At-risk children may face challenges such as difficult temperament, health issues, social or academic difficulties, and lack of awareness of their rights to



protection. The school provides targeted support and interventions to address these specific needs.

DEFINITIONS AND INDICATORS OF ABUSE

Physical Abuse:

Physical abuse is the intentional use of force that results in bodily injury, pain, or impairment. It includes, but is not limited to, actions such as hitting, kicking, shaking, biting, burning, or any form of corporal punishment that causes harm to a child. Additionally, physical abuse includes assaulting or criminally mistreating a child, participating in actions or omissions that result in injury, or creating a significant risk to the child's physical or mental health and developmental well-being. Failure to take reasonable steps to prevent any of the aforementioned actions falls within the purview of physical abuse.

Possible indicators of physical abuse:

- Bruises, welts, burns, or injuries inconsistent with the given explanation.
- Repeated injuries or injuries at different stages of healing.
- Injuries on areas of the body not typically exposed to normal childhood activities.
- Conflicting or changing explanations for the cause of injuries.
- A child displaying fear or apprehension when touched or approached.
- A child demonstrating aggressive behavior or extreme passivity.
- Frequent absences from school without a reasonable explanation.
- Sudden changes in behavior or in academic performance.
- Expressing reluctance or fear about returning home or being in the presence of specific individuals.

Emotional Abuse:

Emotional abuse is characterized by a persistent pattern of behavior that inflicts harm on a child's emotional well-being. This may involve verbal or non-verbal actions aimed at diminishing the child's self-worth, undermining their emotional security, or creating an environment fraught with fear and distress. Emotional abuse encompasses various forms, including constant criticism, humiliation, or the deliberate withholding of love, support, and positive reinforcement crucial for a child's healthy emotional development. It



may involve serious bullying (including cyberbullying), causing children frequently to feel frightened or in danger, or the exploitation or corruption of children. Signs of emotional abuse tend to be behavioral rather than physical.

Possible indicators of emotional abuse:

- The child consistently exhibits feelings of worthlessness or inadequacy.
- Demonstrates a pattern of social withdrawal and reluctance to engage with others.
- Displays fearful or anxious behavior without apparent external triggers.
- Reverts to earlier, less mature behaviors as a response to emotional distress.
- Exhibits aggressive or disruptive behavior as a coping mechanism for emotional pain.
- Shows signs of depression, including persistent sadness or hopelessness.
- Unwillingness to make eye contact with adults or peers.
- Struggles in forming and maintaining healthy relationships due to emotional challenges.

Sexual Abuse:

Sexual abuse is a profoundly distressing violation that encompasses any non-consensual or inappropriate sexual activity imposed upon a child or the exposure of a child to sexual content. This includes, but is not limited to, acts such as sexual assault, molestation, indecent exposure, or coercing a child into the production or consumption of sexually explicit material. Sexual abuse inflicts severe emotional and psychological harm on the child, compromising their sense of safety, trust, and overall well-being.

Possible indicators of sexual abuse:

- Sudden and unexplained shifts in behavior or mood, particularly in a sexually explicit context.
- Demonstrates an understanding of sexual acts beyond their age-appropriate level of knowledge.
- Presence of unexplained bruises, bleeding, or pain in the genital or anal area.



- Displays fear or avoidance of specific individuals or places associated with the abuse.
- Reverts to earlier, less mature behaviors as a coping mechanism in response to the trauma.
- Engages in explicit sexual behaviors that are developmentally inappropriate for their age.
- Experiences nightmares, bedwetting, or other sleep disturbances related to the traumatic experience.
- A decline in academic performance or concentration due to the emotional impact of the abuse.

Neglect:

Neglect is the failure to provide essential care, attention, or basic needs necessary for a child's well-being and healthy development. It includes the consistent deprivation of physical, emotional, or educational necessities, leading to potential harm or impairment. Neglect can manifest in various forms, such as inadequate supervision, lack of proper nutrition, failure to provide medical care, or emotional neglect that undermines a child's emotional security.

Possible indicators of neglect:

- Persistent signs of malnutrition, poor personal hygiene, or inappropriate clothing for weather conditions.
- Failure to address or seek medical attention for chronic health problems or injuries.
- Regular, unexplained absences from school, indicating a lack of parental involvement or concern for education.
- Leaving a child unsupervised for extended periods or exposing them to situations inappropriate for their age.
- Minimal emotional responsiveness from caregivers, leading to the child feeling emotionally neglected.
- Living in unsanitary or unsafe conditions, lacking essential utilities or proper shelter.
- Inconsistent provision of basic needs, such as clothing, food, or essential personal items.
- Failure to address a child's developmental needs, resulting in delays or hindrance in academic or social progress.



REPORTING PROCEDURES

The staff member will utilize the indicators of abuse and neglect outlined in the AIS Child Protection and Well-being Handbook as a reference for reporting to the administration and the guidance counselor. Reporting becomes obligatory for a staff member if there is reasonable cause to believe that a child has experienced abuse or neglect.

Confidentiality

Adults should never guarantee confidentiality to anyone making a report, nor should they agree to keep a secret that may endanger the health or safety of themselves or someone else. Individuals reporting suspected abuse or neglect, as well as school personnel involved, must not discuss the case beyond the steps outlined in this policy. Information will be shared on a “need-to-know basis” only and held with strict confidentiality.

WHAT TO DO IF A CHILD DISCLOSES ABUSE:

- Maintain a calm demeanor to accurately report the situation to the counselor or principal who will determine the next steps.
- Refrain from confronting the alleged abuser or discussing the disclosure with the student's parents, therapists, or other staff members. If a child insists on secrecy, do not agree. Explain that for their safety, you may need to speak to someone they trust, such as the counselor. Avoid being judgmental and refrain from seeking specific details.
- Express that the student did the right thing by sharing the information.
- Affirm that no one deserves to be abused and assure the student that you will do everything possible to help, involving someone else the student trusts at school.
- Concentrate on the immediate needs of the student.
- Ask if the student feels comfortable reporting the abuse themselves to the counselor, principal, or director, and offer to accompany them.
- If the child expresses reluctance to go home, treat it as an emergency.



- Report it immediately by contacting a member of the school's child protection team and decide on an appropriate plan for the child.
- Be honest with the student and avoid making promises that cannot be kept.
- Record the disclosure in writing, including the date, time, and your signature.
- Keep the disclosure confidential, except when reporting to school administration or, if necessary, local authorities.

WHAT TO DO WHEN SUSPECTING CASES OF ABUSE:

Step 1 - Receiving A Report & Gathering Initial Information:

The Counselor will take initial steps to gather information regarding the reported incident. In all cases, follow-up activities will be conducted in a manner ensuring that information is documented factually, and strict confidentiality is maintained.

The following procedure will be used:

- Discussions between the child and counselor to gain more information.
- Report status of the case to the section Principal and Dean of Students.
- Observations of the child as necessary by the teacher, doctor, counselor, and/or administrator.
- Interview staff members as necessary and document information relative to the case.
- Consult with school staff to review the child's history as necessary.
- Report status of the case to the Director.

Determine the course of follow-up actions, which may include: Closing the case

- Further internal investigation
- Initiating external investigation (consultants, legal counsel, law enforcement, etc.)
- Further follow-up as warranted

If the abuse or neglect allegation involves a staff or faculty member, the school administration will follow policies and procedures to ensure child



safety and ethical professional behavior. Actions taken may include immediate administrative leave, full internal or external investigation, involvement of law enforcement, and disciplinary proceedings, which may result in termination of the contract.

Step 2 - After Initial Investigation:

Based on acquired information, a plan of action will be developed to assist the child and family. Actions that may take place include: discussions between the child and counselor, in-class observations meetings with the family, consultation with other divisional counselors or knowledgeable AIS staff, referral of the student and family to external professional counseling, consultation with the school's attorney, informal consultation with local authorities and/or referral to the AIS comité de convivencia.

Following the initial investigation, the subsequent course of action will be determined, encompassing options such as closing the case, conducting a more in-depth internal investigation, or initiating an external investigation involving consultants, legal counsel, law enforcement, or other relevant entities. The choice among these actions will be guided by the specific circumstances of the case, with the paramount goal of ensuring a thorough and appropriate response to any suspected child abuse or neglect.

Step 3 - Follow-Up:

- Subsequent to a reported and/or substantiated case of child abuse or neglect, the Principal and counselor will collaborate to create a follow-up plan, which may include maintaining contact with the child and family for support and guidance, providing ongoing support to the child's teachers and the principal, offering resource materials and strategies for teacher use, and maintaining contact with outside therapists to update the progress of the child in school.
- Report status of the case to the Director and determine the course of follow-up actions, which may include closing the case or further follow-up as warranted.

All documentation of the investigation will be kept in the counselor's confidential records. Records sent to transferring schools may include notice that there is a confidential letter for the child. The Altamira International School will make every attempt to share information to protect the child.



Most cases of suspected abuse or neglect will be handled by school counselors, such as those involving student relationships with peers, parenting skills related to disciplining children at home, student-parent relationships, mental health issues such as depression, low self-esteem, and grieving. Some cases will be referred to outside resources, for example, mental health issues such as depression, psychosis, dissociation, and suicide ideation.

In extreme cases when families do not stop the abuse or concerns remain about the safety of the child, reports could be made to local agencies (e.g. Instituto Colombiano de Bienestar Familiar-ICBF)

This institution remains committed to promoting a safe and secure environment by protecting all children in our care. Based on this commitment, the Altamira International School will maintain this Child Protection Policy, will inform parents of key information related to child protection, will teach students appropriate skills and knowledge related to abuse and neglect, will provide annual training for all staff on key responsibilities, and will make every effort to implement strict hiring practices to ensure the safety of children.

Altamira International School promotes respect, honesty, service, responsibility and kindness as core values. It also focuses on developing students' social skills for the future and teaches them their right to protection, healthy relationships, assertiveness and use of support systems.

US Federal Child Protection Laws:
<https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/majorfedlegis.pdf> Ley Colombiana 1098:
http://www.secretariasenado.gov.co/senado/basedoc/ley_1098_2006.html
UN Convention on the Rights of the Child:
<https://www.crin.org/en/home/rights/convention/text-convention4>
Article Law 1146 of 2007