



MAJURO COOPERATIVE SCHOOL  
MARSHALL ISLANDS

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## *Child Protection Policy*

*Majuro Cooperative School is defining a standard for the treatment of all children and youth - that they are treated with respect and dignity at all times.*

*Children and youth have legal and moral rights to their individuality, that when protected, will develop into the ability to meet the needs of the family, community, and global society. Child protection standards defined by Co-op encompass all cultures and international law. When given reasonable cause to believe that these rights are violated, Co-op will seek all available resources to restore those rights.*

All staff employed at Majuro Cooperative School must report suspected incidences of child abuse or neglect whenever the staff member 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.

Furthermore, cases of suspected child abuse or neglect may be reported to the appropriate employer, to the respective organizations in Majuro, and/or to local authorities.

Majuro Cooperative School endorses the Convention on the Rights of the Child, of which the RMI, is a signatory and seeks to be a safe haven for students who may be experiencing abuse or neglect in any aspect of their lives.

Majuro Cooperative School will distribute this policy annually to all parents and applicants, will communicate this policy annually to students, will provide annual training for all staff, and will make every effort to implement hiring practices to ensure the safety of children.

In the case of a staff member reported as an alleged offender, Co-op will conduct an investigation following a carefully designed course of due process.

### ***Abuse***

*is that it is dependent on some form of a relationship that is used to meet the need of the more powerful person, either a member of the family, a teacher, or a friend.*

Definitions of abuse are complex and based in various cultures of child-rearing behaviors, gender and role responsibilities and expectations. Research guides much of the definitions that are based in understanding the impact of certain behaviors.

### ***POSSIBLE INDICATORS OF PHYSICAL ABUSE***

- Unexplained bruises and welts on any part of the body
- Bruises of different ages (various colors)
- Injuries reflecting shape of article used (electric cord, belt, buckle, ping pong paddle, hand)
- Injuries that regularly appear after absence or vacation
- Unexplained burns, especially to soles, palms, back, or buttocks
- Burns with a pattern from an electric burner, iron, or cigarette
- Rope burns on arms, legs, neck, or torso
- Injuries inconsistent with information offered by the child
- Immersion burns with a distinct boundary line
- Unexplained laceration, abrasions, or fractures



**Abuse is:**

- Inflicting physical injury on a child by other than accidental means, causing skin bruising, burns, disfigurement, impairment of physical or emotional health, or loss or impairment of any bodily function, death;

and/or

- creating a substantial risk of physical harm to a child’s bodily functioning;

and/or

- committing acts that are cruel or inhumane regardless of observable injury. Such acts may include, but are not limited to, instances of extreme discipline demonstrating a disregard of a child’s pain and/or mental suffering;

and/or

- assaulting or criminally mistreating a child as defined by either the criminal code or school policy;

and/or

- engaging in actions or omissions resulting in injury to, or creating a substantial risk to the physical or mental health or development of a child;

and/or

- failing to take reasonable steps to prevent the occurrence of any of the above.
- Physical (e.g., failure to provide necessary food or shelter, or lack of appropriate supervision—this would include failure to provide proper adult guardianship such as leaving children unsupervised at home for any extended period of time;

and/or

- Medical (e.g., failure to provide necessary medical or mental health treatment);

and/or

- Emotional (e.g., a pattern of actions, such as: inattention to a child’s emotional needs, failure to provide psychological care, or permitting the child to use alcohol or other drugs, specific examples may include verbal humiliation, refusing to acknowledge presence of child, invasion of privacy for no specific reason, violent threats, etc.).

***Neglect***

*is failure to provide for a child’s basic needs within their own environment.*

**POSSIBLE INDICATORS OF NEGLECT**

- Child is unwashed or hungry
- Parents are uninterested in child’s academic performance
- Parents do not respond to repeated communications from the school
- Child does not want to go home
- Parents cannot be reached in the case of emergency

**Behavioral indicators in and of themselves do not constitute abuse or neglect. Together with other indicators, such as family dynamics, they may warrant a referral.**

**What happens when a teacher has reasonable cause to believe?**

These indicators of abuse and neglect will be used by the staff member as a guideline for reporting to the counselor and/or coordinating principal, who will determine if the case needs further attention.

A report must be made when a staff member has reasonable cause to believe that a child has suffered abuse or neglect. All reports are confidential.



### **Sexual Abuse**

*is committing or allowing to be committed any sexual offense against a child as defined in either the criminal code of the host country or school policy, or intentionally touching either directly or through clothing, the genitals, anus, or breasts of a child for other than hygiene or child care purposes.*

#### **POSSIBLE INDICATORS OF SEXUAL ABUSE**

- Sexual knowledge, behavior, or use of language not appropriate to age level
- Unusual interpersonal relationship patterns
- Venereal disease in a child of any age
- Evidence of physical trauma or bleeding to the oral, genital, or anal areas
- Difficulty in walking or sitting
- Refusing to change into PE clothes, fear of bathrooms
- Child running away from home and not giving any specific complaint
- Not wanting to be alone with an individual
- Pregnancy, especially at a young age
- Extremely protective parenting

Sexual abuse has some different characteristics of child abuse that warrant special attention.

While physical abuse is often the result of immediate stress and not usually planned, sexual abuse requires planning with results that are more insidious. The planning, referred to as Grooming, often results in victims accepting the blame, responsibility, guilt and shame for the sexual behavior of the offender. Sexual abuse requires far more secrecy than other forms of child abuse, so is more difficult to report.

Many victims, through the process of grooming, are taught that the sex is a form of love, so tend to love their offender and often present as happy and well-adjusted children with no negative symptoms because of their perception of being loved. Working with the sexual offender cannot be done by school counselors.

#### **What happens after suspected abuse or neglect is reported?**

**Where there is cause to suspect** child abuse or neglect, it is the responsibility of the staff member to report their suspicions to the counselor and coordinating principal. All staff, faculty and administrators are mandated to report incidences of abuse and neglect. All Co-op employees are also required to report suspicion of abuse or neglect. All reports of abuse and neglect must be made to the coordinating principal immediately.

#### **Procedures for reporting suspected cases of child abuse or neglect**

##### **Step 1**

When a child reports abuse or there is reasonable cause to believe that abuse is occurring, the teacher will seek advice from school counselor/coordinating principal within 48 hours. The principal and/or School Counselor will take initial steps to gather information regarding the reported incident and will form a school-based response team as needed to address the report. The response team will include the school counselor, the elementary principal and the middle/high school principal. In all cases, follow up activities will be conducted in a manner that ensures that information is documented factually and that strict confidentiality is maintained. The following procedure will be used:

- 1). Interview staff members as necessary and document information relative to the case.
- 2). Consult with school personnel to review the child's history in the school.
- 3). Determine the course of follow-up actions.

##### **Step 2**

Based on acquired information, a plan of action will be developed to assist the child and family.

Actions that **may** take place are:

- Discussions between the child and counselor in order to gain more information. Depending upon the age of the child, these discussions may include drawing pictures and playing with dolls to elicit more information as to what may have occurred.
- In-class observations of the child by the teacher, counselor, or principal.
- Meetings with the family to present Co-op's concerns.
- Referral of the student and family to external professional counseling.
- Informal consultation with local organizations and/or authorities.



**Most cases of suspected abuse or neglect will be handled by the school counselor, such as those involving:**

- *Student relationships with peers*

**Some cases will be referred to outside resources, for example:**

- *Parenting skills related to disciplining children at home*
- *Student-parent relationships*
- *Mental health issues such as depression, low self-esteem, grieving.*
- *Mental health issues such as depression, psychosis, dissociation, suicide ideation.*

**Cases reported for investigation and outside resources:**

- *Severe and ongoing physical abuse or neglect*
- *Sexual abuse and incest.*

**In extreme cases when families do not stop the abuse or concerns remain about the safety of the child, reports could be made to:**

- *The Marshall Islands Police Department*

### **Step 3:**

After a reported and/or substantiated case of child abuse or neglect:

- The counselor will maintain contact with the child and family to provide suggestions for support and guidance as appropriate.
- The counselor will provide the child's teachers and the principal with ongoing support.
- The counselor will provide resource materials and strategies for teacher use.
- The counselor will maintain contact with outside therapists to update the progress of the child in school.

All documentation of the investigation will be kept in the child's school confidential records file. Records sent to schools to which their student may transfer will be flagged to let the receiving school know there is a confidential file for the child. Co-op will make every attempt to share this information to protect the child.

If the abuse or neglect allegation involves a staff or faculty member of Co-op, the principal will follow policy pursuant to ethical professional behavior.

## **In Conclusion**

### **The Co-op child protection policy works for the child, the family and the community**

The Co-op Child Protection Policy works to respond at all three levels.

**THE COMMUNITY** - at-risk characteristics include limited laws on child protection, limited resources to families, unusually high work stress placed on parents, acceptance of inappropriate behavior towards children (excessive corporal punishment) - strictly implements the Child Protection Policy, trains teachers to recognize abuse, trains counselors in supporting families, trains and supports parents in protective behaviors, networks with community and health services for holistic referrals, networks with local authorities

**THE FAMILY** - at-risk characteristics include parents under stress, families with perceived less support and access to resources, parental/family history of inappropriate discipline as children. Co-op works with parents to understand appropriate discipline, networks with community and health services, teaches parents child protection practices

**THE CHILD** - at-risk children include those with difficult temperament, defiance, health issues, social or academic difficulties, and those unaware of their rights to protection

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*If the abuse or neglect allegation involves a staff or faculty member of Co-op, the principal will follow policy pursuant to ethical professional behavior.*



**Majuro Cooperative School**

**Report of Actual or Suspected Child Abuse or Neglect Form**

Time and Date of Report:

Reporting Staff Member:

Name of Person at CO-OP that incident was reported to:

Name of child, age, grade level and gender:

Parent's names and contact details (include address and phone#):

Type of suspected Abuse:    Physical\_\_\_ Emotional\_\_\_    Sexual\_\_\_        Neglect\_\_\_        Other\_\_\_

Brief Narrative of Incident (include where, when and how the disclosure took place)

Date, Time and place the alleged abuse happened:

The names of witnesses if available when the abuse occurred:

The account that was given of the allegation with the nature of abuse and outcome, if known:

