

AFS Intercultural Exchanges — Program Participant Protection Policy

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1. Rationale and Purposes

- 1.1 AFS Intercultural Exchanges (hereinafter AFS HK), one of the organizations of AFS Intercultural Programs (hereinafter AFS INT) located in Hong Kong, is committed to:
- taking a zero-tolerance stance towards abuse against AFS HK's program participants (hereinafter abuse);
 - making all reasonable efforts to minimize the risk of abuse;
 - handling any suspicion or allegation of abuse in a prompt and supportive manner.
- 1.2 The purposes of this document are to:
- provide a policy framework for protecting AFS HK's program participants;
 - provide key stakeholders listed in paragraphs 2.3 and 2.4 and partner schools of our programs with guidance on procedures when they receive any suspicion or allegation of abuse;
 - enhance AFS HK's program participants' understanding and awareness of abuse and the ways to deal with abuse.
- 1.3 This document should be read in conjunction with "Other Important Information" listed in paragraph 8.2.

2. Definitions and Scopes

- 2.1 All AFS HK's program participants, regardless of age, disability, gender, racial heritage, religious belief, sexual orientation or identity, have the right to protection from all types of abuse¹.
- 2.2 AFS HK's program participants refer to the exchange students of overseas exchange programs, the exchange students of local hosting programs, and the participants of local programs (e.g. Global Citizenship Education Project) (hereinafter program participants).
- 2.3 Key stakeholders of this document include AFS HK's staff members, volunteers, service providers, virtual facilitators, and anyone working on behalf of AFS HK. They have the duty to handle any suspicion or allegation of abuse in a prompt and supportive manner.
- 2.4 Key stakeholders listed in paragraph 2.3 work closely with program participants' parents, host parents, and schools, as well as AFS partner offices, AFS INT, and appropriate authorities and agencies.

¹ Please refer to this paper for more details: AFS INT's "Policy on Safeguarding AFS Participants".

- 2.5 Abuse refers to the commission or omission of an act that endangers or impairs the physical, sexual, psychological health and development of a program participant².
- 2.6 Any person reporting a complaint or allegation or expressing concern about any potential or actual abuse (hereinafter allegation) should be handled in a prompt and supportive manner.

3. Misconduct Behaviors

- 3.1 Violence offences in Hong Kong — the Offences Against the Person Ordinance contains some offences relating to violence against individuals, including people under the age of 16 years³:
- physical violence — the unlawful use of force, ranging from common assault to grievous bodily harm, regardless of age;
 - ill-treatment or neglect — to wilfully assault, ill-treat, or neglect people under the age of 16 years, including failing to provide adequate food, clothing or lodging.
- 3.2 Sexual offences in Hong Kong — there are mainly three kinds of sexual offences⁴:
- non-consensual sexual offences to protect a person's sexual autonomy, e.g. indecent assault, rape, buggery, procuring an unlawful sexual act by threats or intimidation, voyeurism, upskirt photography, publication of images originating from commission of offence under section 159AAB(1)⁵ or 159AAC(1)⁶, and publication or threatened publication of intimate images without consent;
 - sexual offences to protect vulnerable people such as those under the age of 16 years, e.g. sexual offences involving young persons or children, indecency with children under 16, procuring a girl under 21, and child pornography;
 - sexual offences to protect public morality that are intended to promote a social or moral goal, e.g. indecency, and acts outraging public decency.
- 3.3 Program participants may refer to the below examples of physical violence and neglect⁷:

² Please visit these websites for more details: The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region's Press Release on "LCQ15: Family and child protective services"; HKU Law & Technology Centre's website on "Children's constitutional rights".

³ Please visit this website for more details: HKU Law & Technology Centre's website on "Violence against children".

⁴ Please visit this website for more details: HKU Law & Technology Centre's website on "Sexual Offences".

⁵ Please visit this website for more details: Hong Kong Legal Information Institute's "Section 159AAB of the Crimes Ordinance (Cap. 200)".

⁶ Please visit this website for more details: Hong Kong Legal Information Institute's "Section 159AAC of the Crimes Ordinance (Cap. 200)".

⁷ Please visit this website for more details: HKSAR Social Welfare Department's "Protecting Children from Maltreatment Procedural Guide for Multi-disciplinary Co-operation (Revised 2020)".

- physical violence — punching, kicking, striking with an object, poisoning, suffocating, and burning;
- neglect — unsafe living environment (e.g. with dangerous items/household drugs accessible to program participants), and failure to provide necessary medical or mental health treatments to program participants.

3.4 Program participants may refer to the below examples of psychological abuse⁸:

- psychological abuse is the repeated pattern of behaviour and attitudes towards an individual or extreme incident that endangers or impairs the individual's emotional or intellectual development;
- examples include spurning, terrorizing, isolating, exploiting/corrupting, and denying emotional responsiveness.

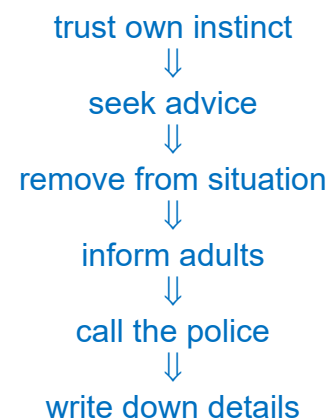
3.5 Program participants may refer to the below examples of sexual misconduct⁹:

- rape;
- sexual assault;
- unwanted physical contact, not only limited to “private” body parts;
- exposing oneself (e.g. showing the genitals);
- masturbation in the presence of another person, or forcing someone to masturbate;
- inappropriate comments with a sexually suggestive nature;
- using obscene language or content with sexual connotations in phone calls and text messages, or on social media;
- producing, sharing, requesting, or inviting to view pornographic photos, images or movies.

4. Steps to Deal with Abuse and Handle Allegations

4.1 When a program participant is being abused, or is unsure about whether he/she is being abused, he/she should:

- trust his/her own instinct.
He/she has every right to say “no” to any behavior that is unacceptable to him/her or makes him/her feel uncomfortable;
- seek advice from parents, host parents, teachers, and support contacts and staff members of AFS HK and AFS partner offices on normal behaviors of people he/she does not know;



⁸ Please refer to this paper for more details: HKSAR Social Welfare Department's “Child Abuse…… It Matters You What is Psychological Abuse”.

⁹ Please refer to this paper for more details: AFS INT's “Sexual Misconduct: Reporting and Response Guidelines & Checklists for AFS National Organizations (NO)”.

- remove himself/herself from the situation, and shout for help to stop the perpetrator;
- inform his/her parents, host parents, teachers, and support contacts and staff members of AFS HK and AFS partner offices as soon as possible. If that occurs in his/her host family, he/she should not keep it a secret;
- call a police officer if he/she feels that he/she is in danger. He/she should take note of the emergency number of the host country/city. In Hong Kong, he/she can call the police at 999 to seek urgent help;
- write down the details of the incident(s), including the date(s), time(s), location(s), and witness(es).

4.2 Any person reporting an allegation of abuse must be assured that:

- he/she will be taken seriously;
- his/her comments and witness statements will usually be treated confidentially unless AFS HK is required to share this information with appropriate authorities.

4.3 If key stakeholders listed in paragraphs 2.3 and 2.4 receive any suspicion or allegation of abuse, they should:

- handle the abuse in accordance with this document;
- report the abuse to local authorities and agencies according to local law requirements.

4.4 AFS HK should take the below initial steps upon receiving any suspicion or allegation of abuse against exchange students of local hosting programs:

- ensure that the program participant is in a safe place. If the incident happened in the home of the host family and/or a family member is involved, move the program participant out of the home immediately;
- if the program participant is injured, take him/her to an emergency room for a medical examination; and ask if there is a person of trust to accompany the program participant;
- coordinate with the partner school to assess the needs and help arrange counselling service and legal advice;
- report the incident to the sending partner via phone, and document the incident via the support module;
- report the incident to the appropriate authorities/agencies in accordance with legal guidelines; ensure that the program participant understands the requirement before reporting;
- if a staff/volunteer is involved in the allegation, suspend any contact with or care of the program participant;
- maintain its impartiality and avoid any conflict in interests/roles.

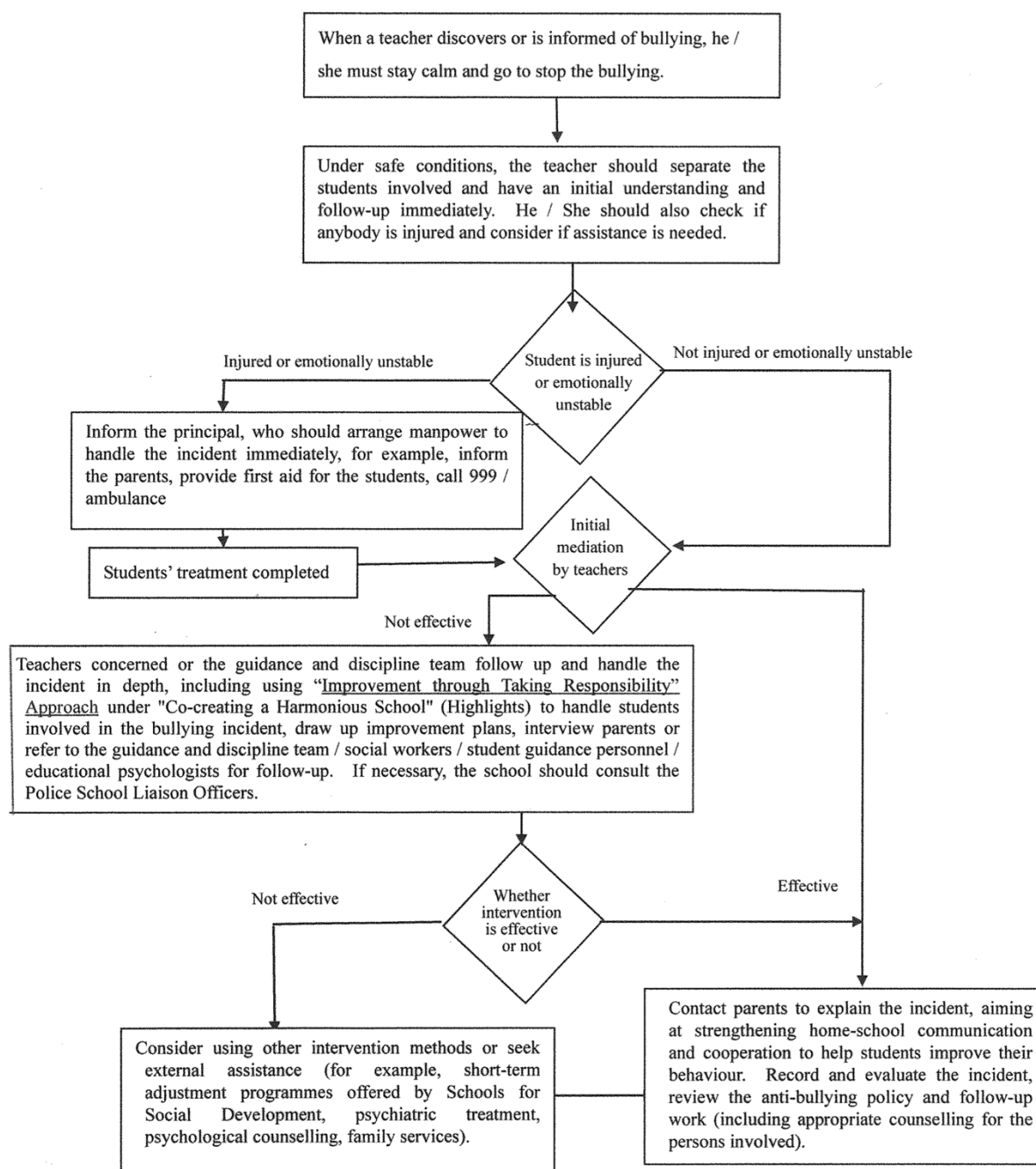
5. Role of Schools

5.1 Program participants may study and/or participate in activities arranged by/in local schools. This chapter covers the guidelines on prevention and handling of bullying, maltreatment and sexual harassment incidents in schools provided by the Education Bureau.

5.2 Preventing bullying — schools could¹⁰:

- setup a whole-school policy on anti-bullying;
- implement whole-school policy on anti-bullying;
- conduct campus management.

5.3 Handling bullying and following up — schools could follow the below flowchart¹¹:



¹⁰ Please refer to this website for more details: HKSAR Education Bureau's "Preventing Bullying".

¹¹ Please refer to this website for more details: HKSAR Education Bureau's "Flowchart for Handling Bullying Incidents in Schools".

5.4 Handling maltreatment — schools should¹²:

- establish or enhance schools' internal mechanism, procedures and measures, so as to prevent maltreatment incidents, handle suspected maltreatment cases properly and provide appropriate assistance to the students and their families in need;
- inform the principal and consult student guidance officer(s)/teacher(s)/personnel and school social worker(s);
- activate immediately its school-based contingency mechanism/crisis management team and assign school social worker (if any) and designated personnel (e.g. principal, senior teacher, designated teacher, or student guidance officer/teacher/personnel) to handle and follow up on the suspected maltreatment cases;
- arrange medical examination/treatment in a public hospital if the school considers that the student is likely to be in urgent need of medical service;
- report to the police to protect the safety and interests of the student concerned, in circumstances that suggest a criminal offence may have been committed.

5.5 Prevention of sexual harassment in schools¹³:

- It is the responsibility of schools to ensure that students are able to study and participate in activities in a safe and sexually hostile-free environment. The schools being employers of the staff concerned, may also be vicariously liable;
- As advised by the Equal Opportunities Commission (hereinafter EOC), schools are encouraged to take reasonably practicable steps to ensure that the school is free from any sexually hostile or intimidating environment and to avoid the possible vicarious liability on the employers, including developing a school policy (in written form) to eliminate sexual harassment, raising the understanding and awareness of both staff and students about sexual harassment and setting up complaint handling mechanism to resolve sexual harassment complaints.

5.6 Schools could refer to EOC's anti-sexual harassment resource platform for advice on¹⁴:

- interpretation of sexual harassment;
- liabilities;
- school policy formulation;
- promotion and education;
- training and support;
- handling sexual harassment complaints.

5.7 The Mandatory Reporting of Child Abuse Ordinance, which mandates 25 categories of specified professionals from the social welfare, education and healthcare sectors to report serious child abuse cases, will commence on

¹² Please refer to this website for more details: HKSAR Education Bureau's "Handling Suspected Cases of Child Maltreatment and Domestic Violence".

¹³ Please refer to this website for more details: HKSAR Education Bureau's "Prevention of Sexual Harassment in Schools".

¹⁴ Please refer to this website for more details: Equal Opportunities Commission's anti-sexual harassment resource platform of "FAQ for Students and Educators".

January 20, 2026. As such, the Hong Kong Government published a guide for mandated reporters' reference on child protection on 24 July, 2025¹⁵. Education professionals should study the guide, which covers reportable circumstances, decision trees, supplementary analytical frameworks and sample case scenarios.

6. AFS HK's Obligations

- 6.1 AFS HK will continue to check whether eligible applicants, potential employees and trainers have any criminal conviction records against a specified list of sexual offences, through the Hong Kong Police Force's "Sexual Conviction Record Check Scheme". Moreover, the employment of an employee can be terminated if found guilty of allegations or charges.
- 6.2 AFS HK will continue to assign employees to attend child and youth protection trainings.
- 6.3 AFS HK will circulate this document to program participants, key stakeholders listed in paragraphs 2.3 and 2.4 and partner schools of our programs, and inform them of the responsibilities to safeguard the program participants.

7. Contact Details

- 7.1 For any program participant who feels that he/she has been abused, or anyone who suspects that a program participant has been abused, he/she should contact a staff/Board member of AFS HK:

- Executive Director
Ms. Angela YUNG
Office: 2821-2505
Mobile: 9074-8082
Email: angela.yung@afs.org
- Senior Program Officer (Hosting Program)
Ms. Helen LEE
Office: 2821-2509
Mobile: 9261-0383
Email: helen.lee@afs.org
- Program Manager (Sending Program)
Ms. Elise CHAN
Office: 2821-2506
Mobile: 9080-0383
Email: elise.chan@afs.org

¹⁵ Please refer to this website for more details: Child Protection's ["Guide for Mandated Reporters"](#).

- Vice Chair of Board
Dr. Arnett Michael EDWARDS
Email: arnett.edwards@afs.org

8. Other Important Information

- 8.1 For program participants of overseas programs, please refer to the relevant regulations and guidelines of the host countries, and contact their AFS offices for more details.
- 8.2 The below materials have been referenced in this document and can be downloaded or accessed via our website <https://bit.ly/4m4bJLZ>:
- AFS HK's "Host Student Safety Handbook 2025/26";
 - AFS INT's "Policy on Safeguarding AFS Participants";
 - AFS INT's "Sexual Misconduct: Reporting and Response Guidelines & Checklists for AFS National Organizations (NO)";
 - Child Protection's "Guide for Mandated Reporters";
 - Equal Opportunities Commission's anti-sexual harassment resource platform of "FAQ for Students and Educators";
 - Hong Kong Legal Information Institute's "Section 159AAB of the Crimes Ordinance (Cap. 200)";
 - Hong Kong Legal Information Institute's "Section 159AAC of the Crimes Ordinance (Cap. 200)";
 - HKSAR Education Bureau's "Flowchart for Handling Bullying Incidents in Schools";
 - HKSAR Education Bureau's "Handling Suspected Cases of Child Maltreatment and Domestic Violence";
 - HKSAR Education Bureau's "Preventing Bullying";
 - HKSAR Education Bureau's "Prevention of Sexual Harassment in Schools";
 - HKSAR's Press Release on "LCQ15: Family and child protective services";
 - HKSAR Social Welfare Department's "Child Abuse..... It Matters You What is Psychological Abuse";
 - HKSAR Social Welfare Department's "Protecting Children from Maltreatment Procedural Guide for Multi-disciplinary Co-operation (Revised 2020)";
 - HKU Law & Technology Centre's websites on "Children's constitutional rights", "Violence against children", and "Sexual Offences".