

## CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

HILA endorses the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, of which Liberia is a signatory. We believe that every child has the right to be protected from harm and all forms of abuse, including physical, sexual, and emotional abuse as well as domestic violence and neglect. The Academy also believes that no child bears the responsibility for the abuse perpetrated on him or her by another. If a child is harmed, he or she has the right to treatment and support.

### Definitions:

According to the World Health Organization, "Child maltreatment, sometimes referred to as child abuse and neglect includes all forms of physical and emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect, and exploitation that results in actual or potential harm to the child's health, development or dignity. Within this broad definition, five subtypes can be distinguished: physical abuse; sexual abuse; neglect and negligent treatment; emotional abuse; and exploitation."

The Academy sets out below the common definitions of abusive behavior as specified:

- **Physical Abuse:** Non accidental physical injury including but not limited to female genital mutilation, burns, human bites, bruises, lacerations, bone fractures, missing teeth and any internal or head injuries, any of which have been intentionally inflicted.
- **Sexual Abuse:** Exploitation of a child by an adult or a child for sexual gratification, including but not limited to obscene conversation, exposure to pornographic material, exhibitionism, genital fondling, incest, and rape.
- **Emotional Abuse:** Mental anguish and/or chronic emotional pain caused by such things as rejection, isolation, severe humiliation, excessive teasing and verbal assault.
- **Domestic Violence:** Allowing a child to witness violence within his/her immediate environment.
- **Neglect:** Persistent abandonment; failure to provide adequate food, water, clothing, shelter, or medical care for a child; failure to protect a child from exposure to any danger which may affect his or her health or development.

### Cultural and religious differences

Within the universally accepted norms of human rights framework, culture, religion, or tradition can never be invoked to condone any form of violence against children.

### Child Abuse Reporting

All employees of HILA have the responsibility to protect students and to act as their advocates in cases of suspected child abuse. If an employee suspects or encounters evidence of child abuse, he or she must immediately report this information to the respective counselor and/or Principal. If a counselor or Principal is in any way involved in the suspicions, the employee must report to the CEO. If the CEO is in any way involved in the suspicions, the employee must report to the Board of Directors. The Board will have a Closed Session on the matter.



## **Response**

The school shall take all reports of abuse seriously. In response to suspected abuse, HILA shall take reasonable, responsible, and legal steps to protect the child. The principal has a coordinating role and has the additional task of ensuring confidentiality and keeping the CEO informed as appropriate. The principal is the designated person with regards to student contact. In all decisions, the protection and safety of the child will remain the foremost concern.

## **Child Abuse Prevention**

In order to protect the students and staff of the school:

- HILA shall conduct a comprehensive verification of previous employment of any applicant.
- The CEO shall establish regulations for staff for the prevention, reporting, investigation and follow up of (suspected) child maltreatment and shall ensure that particular care is taken with respect to the collection of evidence in a confidential matter.
- The CEO shall ensure that the school staff is periodically informed and educated regarding the symptoms of child abuse, reporting obligations and appropriate regulations for dealing with such issues in the school environment.

The CEO shall periodically undertake a review of policies and regulations in the following areas as part of the effort to prevent child abuse.

- Guidelines for field trips involving overnight accommodation
- Guidelines for appropriate conduct between students and staff
- Educational programs on child protection issues
- Educational programs on human sexuality
- Criteria for screening school staff and volunteers
- Privacy guidelines

All staff, faculty and administrators are mandated to report incidences of abuse and neglect. All HILA employees are also required to report suspicion of abuse or neglect. All reports of abuse and neglect must be made to the counselor, principal, or CEO within 48 hours for immediate response. Failure of employees to report suspicion of abuse or neglect will lead to termination of employment and forwarding of the matter to the proper Liberian authorities.