# Rift Valley Academy Child Safeguarding Policy Revised August 2016

#### **Preamble**

Rift Valley Academy desires to uphold the Biblical tenet that every individual shall be treated with dignity, care and respect. The administration further seeks to model principles of godly leadership, justice and compassion. We acknowledge the innate vulnerability of children and their dependence on adults to protect and nurture them. We place an emphasis on child protection as integral to RVA's core values, recognizing that in protecting the weak we are honoring the Lord whom we love, serve and bear witness to. The devastation created by harm to children in its many forms is deplored. The safety of the child is paramount and will guide RVA in the process of evaluation and decision-making in situations that involve harm or possible harm to a child.

## A. Policy Statements

All staff shall to be familiar with this policy and act professionally and in a mature Christian manner. All Staff shall have signed the Staff Code of Conduct before starting their service and will receive Child Safety updates on an annual basis.

- 1. All staff and other volunteers who work with children shall be adequately screened.
- 2. RVA has a named Child Safety Coordinator who oversees all child safety matters and is designated to receive all reports.
- 3. Staff/volunteers shall not be accepted to serve / work if they have been convicted of sexual abuse.
- 4. Staff/volunteers and Students shall report any suspected harm to a child to the administration.

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- 5. RVA shall assess all reports of suspected child abuse involving an RVA student.
- 6. All reports of student-student harm shall be responded to according to the RVA Child Safety Procedure.
- 7. Any observation of blatant, repeated or intentional disregard or violation of this Code of Conduct or any actual harm to a child shall be reported to the RVA Child Safety Coordinator. The CSC will inform the superintendent.
- 8. All complaints received regarding the misconduct of a national staff member shall be dealt with according to the RVA Child Safety Procedure, and every attempt will be made to conduct a thorough and unbiased assessment of the complaint.
- 9. All complaints whether current or historic regarding an RVA expatriate staff member will be directly referred by the RVA CSC or the RVA Superintendent to **AIM Child Safety Office** cso.io@aimint.org
- 10. RVA shall ensure follow up care for victims of abuse and for the affected community.
- 11. Retaliation against the complainant or accused, from any source, or any attempt to interfere with the assessment shall not be tolerated and may be grounds for dismissal from the student body or from the staff of RVA.
- 12. Confidentiality shall be maintained on a strictly "need-to-know-basis".
- 13. Mandatory education of staff and students regarding prevention, nature, and signs of abuse and neglect shall be provided on an annual basis.

- 14. Staff, parents and students will be clearly informed of our policy and procedures.
- 15. The safety, security and well-being of children are vital in all of RVA's ministries, services and activities. Adult staff and volunteers assume the full responsibility of setting and maintaining clear, appropriate boundaries in all interaction with children. Anyone working with children in the context of an RVA activity is required to comply with the Code of Conduct and to sign that they agree to do so. The Code of Conduct provides RVA's expectations for all adults without exception.
- 16. RVA will ensure that all staff/volunteers will read, understand and sign the Code of Conduct on arrival at RVA and at the beginning of each new term of ministry.
- 17. This policy shall remain effective by regular review against current best practice and lessons learned from internal reviews.

# B. <u>Definitions of Student Abuse and Inappropriate Behavior</u>

The following definitions of abuse and inappropriate behavior will be applied to reports involving any RVA staff, casual staff, volunteers, parents, guardians, family members, campus visitors, students or others regarding incidents affecting RVA students that occur on the RVA campus and/or at RVA sanctioned events, or that have a significant negative impact on the educational environment of RVA.

It is recognized that local and/or national definitions of student abuse and inappropriate behavior may vary, and there are cultural, religious, and ethnic differences in parenting and education. These definitions have been written with an awareness of the various cultures represented at RVA.

They are also subject to Kenyan law as far as it applies. This policy is consistent with globally recognized definitions of abuse and maltreatment<sup>i</sup>

These standard definitions will be applied to all RVA staff, volunteers, parents, guardians, family members, campus visitors, students, and others regardless of their individual culture.

## **Definition of Abuse**

Normal healthy human relationships between adults and children include expressions of care and affection. Adults working with children are encouraged to provide a warm, supportive and nurturing environment. Abuse is the maltreatment of any student, often in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust, or power, which endangers or impairs the health or welfare of a student. Child abuse can occur with or without the consent of the victim. In the context of this policy, our definitions include sexual, physical, emotional abuse and neglect, as well as grooming, and inappropriate behavior. The definitions below are not limited to the examples given.

## 1. Sexual abuse

Sexual abuse is the involvement of a child in sexual activity by an adult (or another child) and can be contact or non-contact<sup>ii</sup> for example:

<u>Verbal:</u> remarks which include sexual threats, solicitation, sexually explicit language (whether in person, on the telephone, or via text messaging or the Internet), or any verbal expression with the intent to arouse or stimulate.

<u>Visual</u>: Indecent exposure, showing or taking of suggestive pictures, pornographic material of genitals, or the showing of unclothed persons, any sexual activity or simulated sexual activity such as masturbation or intercourse, peeping, leering, or staring.

<u>Physical</u>: physical contact (or penetration by penis, fingers, or any other body part or object) with a person's clothed or unclothed genitals, pubic area, buttocks, or the female breast, or causing a child to perform any of these acts; masturbation in front of or to the victim, rubbing, holding, or kissing for the purpose of sexual gratification.

# 2. Physical Abuse

Physical abuse is any act that results in a non-accidental physical injury. Physical discipline by parents of their own student, such as spanking or paddling, is not considered abuse as long as it is reasonable, not done in inappropriate anger, and does not significantly injure the student. The physical punishment of an unrelated child whether or not it causes an injury is not permissible.

#### 3. Emotional Abuse

Emotional abuse is usually a pattern of behavior characterized by a person subjecting or exposing another to harmful behavior that may result in significant psychological trauma, including isolation, anxiety, depression, or post-traumatic stress disorder. It includes acts of commission and acts of omission. This includes, but is not limited to, ridicule, teasing, shouting and yelling at, scapegoating, humiliating, deliberately excluding a child or belittling them in front of others.

## 4. Neglect

Neglect is maltreatment by the significant and unreasonable failure to provide a student with basic needs of food, clothing, warmth and shelter, safe living conditions, emotional and physical security and protection, medical and dental care, cleanliness, education, and appropriate supervision reasonably available to the family or caretakers. To be considered neglect, the failure to provide these needs must also cause, or have a high probability of causing, significant harm to the student's health or physical, emotional, spiritual, or social development. The presence of poverty leading to lack of basic physical needs is not considered to be willful neglect. The determination of when neglect meets the definition of abuse will be made at the discretion of the Child Safety Team.

# 5. Grooming

Grooming is a subtle pattern of behavior consistent with an adult intentionally enticing a student into an emotionally dependent or sexual relationship. Indicators of grooming behavior may include, but are not limited to, the following: developing an 'exclusive' relationship with a student; inappropriately encouraging a student to overstep rules; crossing boundaries of appropriate behavior with a student, either physically,

verbally, or emotionally; inappropriately extending a relationship with a student outside of the assigned environment, for example through texting or meeting privately; sexualizing the relationship with a student, either physically, verbally or emotionally; isolating the student from other relationships; deliberately using strategies to maintain the secrecy of the relationship.

Grooming behavior may be present when some, but not necessarily all, of these indicators are met. The determination of when grooming has occurred will be made at the discretion of the Child Safety Team. If the team determines that grooming has occurred, then it will be found that abuse of a student has occurred.

## 6. Inappropriate Behaviour

If behavior is identified that raises concerns regarding the treatment of a student, but does not meet RVA's definition of abuse, a conclusion of inappropriate behavior will be reached. This may occur when the Code of Conduct has been breached but harm has not occurred, or where harm has been negligible.

### 7. Student-to-Student Incidents

Student-to-student abuse and inappropriate behavior can include all the types of abuse and inappropriate behavior defined above.

Cases of a sexual nature between students will be considered on a case-by-case basis with a focus on trying to understand the motivation of the behavior. Factors to be considered are the age difference between the two students, the type, frequency and intensity of the behavior and the use of influence, force or coercion involved. Sexual Interaction in the context of a consensual dating relationship will not normally be considered a Child Safety matter

# C. <u>Child Safety Inquiry Process</u>

All reports will be responded to objectively, thoroughly and compassionately. The Child Safety Coordinator and the Child Safety Team will be trained sufficiently to undertake this task under the authority of the Superintendent. There will be a consistent response to any Child Safety report whether

current, historic or child-child. All information will be gathered without bias and all findings and outcome decisions will conform to our stated definitions and policy guidelines. The primacy of confidentiality is balanced between the principle of limiting the circle of people involved within the category of 'need to know' and necessity of gathering enough relevant information to determine an outcome decision. The inquiry process is documented from beginning to end , surplus information deleted and then final reports are kept in a secured location.

# Child Safety Inquiry Procedure

## Summary:

- The RVA child safety coordinator is the central repository for all child safety reports and is accountable to the Superintendent, (who is accountable to both the RVA Board and to the ID)
- o In *all reports regarding student-student concerns,* RVA will be responsible for the inquiry process. Any reports involving AIM students, RVA will maintain responsibility for the inquiry but the AIM CSO will be kept informed during the process.
- o In any initial reports involving suspected abuse by a RVA expatriate member of staff or volunteer, the report will immediately become the responsibility of the AIM CSO.
- All reports involving national members of staff are the responsibility of RVA.
- Whenever a student or adult from another mission agency is involved, or RVA shall contact their child safety office as soon as a report has been deemed credible.
- $\circ\ \ \,$  The AIM CSO is available for consultation at any stage during any report.

# Steps

1. Any child safety concern is brought to the RVA Child Safety Coordinator. The CSC makes an initial assessment of report in conjunction with at least one other child safety team member. The Child Safety Assessment Tool is used to make a decision about potential outcomes.

- 2. During this process, the immediate safety and wellbeing of the student is secured.
- 3. If a national staff member is involved this may mean immediate suspension of duty pending a professional and staff misconduct inquiry.
- 4. If the report involves suspected harm or abuse by an ex patriate staff member, then this is referred directly to the AIM CSO who will assume responsibility for the inquiry.
- 5. Additional information is gathered from all relevant sources, such as dorm parents, teachers, and counsellors (this does not include formal interviews at this point). Confidentiality is kept tight and strictly 'need to know'.
- 6. Decision made by the Child Safety Team in consultation with a non-RVA external consultant as to whether to proceed according to options below:
  - a). no further action (does not meet the threshold for harm)
  - b.) refer to school discipline team as non-child safety pastoral or disciplinary matter.
  - c.) move forwards towards further child safety assessment (formal interviews)
  - d.) professional misconduct inquiry of a national staff member (formal interviews)

# The rationale for any of the above decisions must be clearly documented. Also consider at this point that parents and mission agencies may need to be informed.

- 7. Using the Child Safety Assessment Tool: Conduct interviews with a view to assessing all safety issues both individual to the child and wider school risk areas. Interview by two members of staff according to CSPN Best Practice, with notes documented and securely filed.
- 8. Analysis of all the available information. Continue to interview if necessary.
- 9. Write up the findings. This document includes a summary report, information gathered in interviews, outcome decision and action steps.
- 1. Formulate child safety plan to ensure adequate care and safety and follow up of affected child/ren and to include wider contextual safety issues in order to protect other students.

- 2. Implement child safety plan-this may include exclusion from class, additional supervision, referral to counselling, education in the wider school community.
- 3. If an adult has been involved in alleged harm or abuse, complete the staff misconduct inquiry. Interviews with alleged offender(s) with two interviewers present. Taking into account employment contracts and local law as it applies.
- 4. Ensure that all necessary parties are informed as necessary. Write the statement of findings which documents all processes and outcomes. Keep files clearly documented and hard copies in a central location.
- 5. After-Action review. Use Child Safety Impact Tool to identify ongoing risks and vulnerabilities for the school, the community and other students. Make administrative changes as necessary.

Debrief with members of the child safety team. Take note of lessons learned and what could have been done differently. Use lessons learned as the basis for RVA staff education and training.

i http://www.unicef.org/crc/

ii WHO 1999 These guidelines adopt the definition of child sexual abuse formulated by the 1999 WHO Consultation on Child Abuse Prevention (62) which stated that: "Child sexual abuse is the involvement of a child in sexual activity that he or she does not fully comprehend, is unable to give informed consent to, or for which the child is not developmentally prepared and cannot give consent, or that violates the laws or social taboos of society. Child sexual abuse is evidenced by this activity between a child and an adult or another child who by age or development is in a relationship of responsibility, trust or power, the activity being intended to gratify or satisfy the needs of the other person. This may include but is not limited to: — the inducement or coercion of a child to engage in any unlawful sexual activity; — the exploitative use of a child in prostitution or other unlawful sexual practices; — the exploitative use of children in pornographic performance and materials".