

Encounter Academy Safeguarding Policy

Encounter Academy strives to ensure safeguarding practices are maintained during all its activities and to encourage the community of students, parents, volunteers, and personnel members to work together to protect the interests of children.

Concerns or reports of harm will be responded to in alignment with the policies and procedures in this document.

What is Child Abuse?

Child abuse is any action that occurs which causes significant harm to a child. Child abuse may be inflicted by adults or other children. It is not tolerated during any Encounter Academy activity. It is also the responsibility of Encounter Academy to cooperate with other agencies when a child abuse concern is raised.

Physical Abuse

Physical abuse can include, but is not limited to, injuries caused by excessive discipline, severe beatings or shaking, bruising, lacerations or welts, burns, fractures or dislocation, attempted strangulation or subduing a child for purposes other than prescribed medical needs or non-excessive discipline.

Emotional Abuse

All types of abuse and neglect harm children emotionally; however, emotional abuse is persistent emotional maltreatment which damages the confidence and self-esteem of the child, resulting in significant emotional disturbance or trauma. This may include a pattern of insulting, threatening, isolating, degrading, humiliating, or spiritually manipulating behavior. Emotional abuse can be verbal, written or online.

Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse can include, but is not limited to, indecent exposure, obscene communication, sending sexually explicit messages, showing or providing pornography, voyeurism, solicitation to sexual activity, touching private body (above or underneath clothing), fondling, statutory rape, rape, oral and anal sex, or incest. This also includes producing, viewing, or owning child pornography.

Grooming is befriending and establishing an emotional connection with a child, and sometimes the family, to lower the child's inhibitions and to gain their trust for the purpose of sexual abuse, sexual exploitation or trafficking. This can be done face-to-face or online.

Exploitation

Exploitation is any activity that takes advantage of a child that could harm his/her welfare and development. This includes, but is not limited to, sexual or commercial exploitation.

Neglect

Neglect can include the failure, refusal, or inability of a parent or caregiver to provide a child with the basic elements needed for his or her proper growth and development, such as food, clothing, shelter, education, medical care and adequate supervision.

How Can We Prevent Child Abuse?

Safeguarding Officer

A Safeguarding Officer is appointed and identified to the Encounter Academy community. The Safeguarding Officer is responsible for...

- Overseeing safeguarding training for all community members
- Clearly communicating to the community how to raise a concern
- Initiating and overseeing the response to reports of harm
- Actively updating safeguarding policies and ensuring they are followed
- Checking campus spaces to ensure activities are only happening in places with windows and/or good visibility
- Ensuring appropriate supervision is in place at activities.
- Ensuring program specific guideline are in place and communicated to involved members.

Personnel & Volunteer Screening

Anyone applying for a personnel position is required to...

- Submit a recent (no more than two years old) background check
- Provide references that will be contacted
- Communicate any previous safeguarding concerns raised against them
- Agree to maintain the Encounter Academy Safeguarding policy

All volunteers and parents of the Encounter Community are required to...

- Submit a recent (no more than two years old) background check
- Provide the contact information for their sending board or hiring agency
- Communicate any previous safeguarding concerns raised against them
- Agree to maintain the *Encounter Academy Safeguarding Policy*

Safeguarding Training

- All personnel members volunteers, and parents must complete an annual safeguarding training.
- All students will receive age-appropriate safeguarding training of which the timing and content will be communicated to parents.

How Should We Conduct Ourselves with Children?

Appropriate Physical Interactions

Whether it is a student and adult, adult and adult, or student and student, physical contact at Encounter Academy is limited to

- cultural greetings
- a hand on the shoulder
- brief (3 second) side hugs

All other physical contact is off limits including hand holding (except when helping small children), snuggling, touching someone else's hair, stroking, or back massages. No one should be sitting in someone else's lap, laying on top of another person, or sitting so close that legs, arms, or bodies are touching. Wrestling or any other physical engagements such as picking up another person, throwing a person, piggybacks, shoulder rides, arm wrestling, and human pyramids are not allowed. **Special Note:** Parents on campus with their own children may have more physical contact as long as it is in the bounds of what is appropriate for the situation and age of the child.

Appropriate Words

Students may only be called the name indicated by parents/guardians on the application. No other nicknames are permitted. Teasing, roasting, bullying, and sarcastic remarks towards others will not be tolerated. "I was just kidding," or "We were just having fun," are not legitimate excuses. At no time is profanity or pseudo profanity such as "frick you" allowed. Coarsely talking and laughing about the behaviors prohibited in the Encounter Academy Honor Code is not permitted at the Learning Center or in any Encounter Academy activity.

Adults should not single out a student for special attention or communication. Any texts or emails from an adult should also be sent to the parents.

Appropriate Situations

An adult and a student or a student and a student do not go off unseen behind closed doors at Encounter Academy. Doors need to remain open or cameras should be viewing the area. When one-on-one, teachers and students should be in places that are visible. Only one person may be in the bathroom at a time.

Supervision

Students will never be left alone on Encounter Academy property without supervision. If traveling away from the property, students will not be permitted to go off on their own. They will be divided into groups and assigned a travel supervisor who ensures to their safety and well-being.

Prohibited Actions in the Course of Discipline

At Encounter Academy personnel or volunteers are not permitted to use any sort of physical force on a student as a consequence or to make them comply. The only exception would be a circumstance in which an adult may need to temporarily restrain a child in immediate danger to themselves or others. In such case the incident will be explained to the parent the same day it occurred.

A community member (child or adult) should never yell or scream at a student. Speaking angrily and verbally intimidating students is prohibited. If a personnel member or volunteer is feeling upset, they will wait until they have cooled down to talk with a student calmly.

Community members (child or adult) are never permitted to belittle a student, call names, or speak and act in ways that disrespect a student. In the course of discipline, it should be made clear that while the behavior is unacceptable, the student is not being rejected as a person.

How Do We Respond to Concerns?

If a community member has a concern that involves any activities listed in the Honor Code, abusive actions taking place against a child, or inappropriate relationships between adults and children, a report should be made to the Safeguarding Officer. The report should only include the information as the reporting person has witnessed it and the names of the persons involved. No other speculations should be included. The report should be made within 24 hours of the incident. The reporting person should make no efforts to handle the situation themselves. The reporting person must be treated with respect and belief. If a concern or disclosure is brought to another community member, that community member must be take the information to the Safeguarding Officer.

While a concern or report is being investigated, actions must be taken to protect both the potential victim and the reporting person.

After receiving a report, a response team will be formed including the Safeguarding Officer and two others who have received response training. If the report involves the Encounter Academy Coordinator or someone in the Coordinator's family, someone outside Encounter Academy will

be asked to oversee the investigation. If the report involves the Safeguarding Officer or a member of his family, someone else with training will be asked to lead the response.

The response team will involve legal authorities and mission boards when deemed appropriate. Depending on the nature of the report, it may be necessary to temporarily remove a community member from the campus. Cooperation is expected. Concealing information or giving false testimony during an investigation may lead to dismissal of a community member.

What are Encounter Academy's Safeguarding Response Steps

Step 1: Beginning the Investigation

- a. Safeguarding Officer forms response team and begins documenting all information and actions of the team
- b. Team gathers information
- c. Legal authorities and involved mission organization may be notified and involved
- d. Parents usually informed

Step 2: Carrying out the Investigation

- a. Report of investigation progress and possible action plan submitted to Coordinator

Step 3: Acting on the Results

- a. Final report of findings submitted to Coordinator
- b. Coordinator makes final decision on course of action with recommendations from involved personnel members when appropriate
- c. Coordinator will communicate decisions to any relevant persons

Step 4: Planning for the Future

- a. Safeguarding Officer submits plans for organizational improvement to Coordinator to prevent repeated occurrences

In cases of confirmed, willful child abuse that leads to the disciplinary action of expulsion of a community member, Encounter Academy will inform the mission board and any relevant agencies in the person's home country. If this individual seeks to work with another ministry with children, Encounter Academy will communicate the individual's past record.