

## Definitions and indicators of mistreatment and neglect

This document is part of the Child Safeguarding and Protection Policy (2023).

This document provides definitions of the forms of abuse, violence and mistreatment covered in the policy, and a list of physical and behavioural signs which may indicate that a student is the victim of abuse<sup>1</sup>.

The definitions of mistreatment, abuse and violence are complex and in many cultures are based on behaviours in the domain of child education, responsibility and behaviours linked to the gender and role of the people in a child's circle. However cultural interpretation can never be a justification of violence towards children. The main characteristic of child mistreatment is an imbalance of power between the child and another person, whether a family member, teacher or schoolmate.

A person can cause harm by mistreating or neglecting a child, or by failing to act to prevent harm. Children can be mistreated within their family or within an institutional, educational or community setting by persons they know or, more rarely, by strangers (e.g. online, via social media). They can be subjected to violence by one or more adults, or by one or more children.

The four main types of mistreatment are physical, psychological, sexual and neglect. The following four sections define each type and list the physical signs and corresponding behaviours which may indicate that a child is a victim of that mistreatment.

The list should help to identify possible signs of abuse and to encourage people to make an internal report if they have concerns or suspect abuse. Institut Florimont's inter-disciplinary child protection team is tasked with verifying these concerns, deciding on the appropriate procedure and escalating the case to the Director General who, in consultation with the médecin répondant (school's doctor), may forward the case to child protection agencies and/or the police<sup>2</sup>. It is important to bear in mind that different types of abuse can occur at the same time.

---

1 This document uses local and international sources of information, such as EduCare, Child Protection in International Schools, 2019 and Geneva's Département de l'instruction publique (public education, training and youth dept.), Directive Enfants en danger et écoles privées, 2019.

2 Refer to section 3 of the Child Safeguarding and Protection Policy for a full description of these procedures.

## 1. PHYSICAL MISTREATMENT

Physical violence can take the following forms:

- Hitting with hands or objects, kicking.
- Shaken baby syndrome.
- Serious physical injury: burns, twisted or fractured limbs.
- Serious physical attack: strangulation, suffocation, drowning.
- Abusive administration of medication: overdose, no details of medical treatment.

Possible signs of physical mistreatment

Children often get bumps and bruises in the course of everyday play or their social interactions, but this does not necessarily mean that they are being mistreated. All injuries must be viewed in the context of the child's age, developmental stage and family background, position on the body and explanations given by the child or third parties.

Physical signs	Behavioural signs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• finger marks on parts of the body unlikely for bruises to occur in everyday play</li> <li>• presence of injuries at various stages of healing, suggesting that the child has been mistreated repeatedly over a period of time</li> <li>• injuries to soles of the feet</li> <li>• bald patches on child's head</li> <li>• injuries in a shape or pattern</li> <li>• scalds or burns, including cigarette burns</li> <li>• black eyes, broken bones, bite marks</li> <li>• marks which could indicate that the child has been restrained or strangled</li> <li>• injuries which do not match explanations given</li> <li>• bruises in immobile babies (i.e. not yet at the stage of development where they can sit unaided, turn over, slither on their stomach or crawl)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• flinches when touched</li> <li>• cannot remember how injuries occurred</li> <li>• avoids getting changed for sport or other activities</li> <li>• wears long trousers and long-sleeved top even on hot or sunny days (must be assessed on a case-by-case basis)</li> <li>• does not want to go home</li> <li>• displays excessive need to please</li> <li>• is aggressive or withdrawn</li> <li>• tries to run away</li> <li>• appears sad, often tearful</li> <li>• consumes drugs and/or alcohol</li> <li>• child's behaviour does not correspond to the stage of development</li> </ul>

## 2. SEXUAL ABUSE

Sexual abuse consists of forcing or persuading a child to take part in sexual activities. Non-consensual sexual activities are classed as sexual assault or rape, depending on the case. Sexual abuse does not necessarily involve physical violence on the part of the perpetrator; the child may or may not be aware of what is happening.

Sexual abuse can involve physical contact, such as:

- assault with penetration ;
- non-penetrative acts such as masturbation, kissing, fondling and touching through clothing.

It can also include non-contact activities, such as:

- exposing children to sexual activities ;
- making children behave in a sexually inappropriate way ;
- engaging in inappropriate sexual roleplay ;
- making children view or make sexual images ;
- grooming a child for the intention of abuse (including online).

Research shows that many child victims of sexual abuse do not talk to anyone about their mistreatment. Many children who have been sexually abused by a person responsible for their care present no visible signs because the attacker is careful to leave no marks.

Perpetrators of sexual abuse are not only men. Although it is less common, women are also known to commit sexual abuse, as are other children. Sexual abuse and harassment can also occur between children of either sex. Sometimes the perpetrators are a group of children sexually harassing or assaulting a child by himself or even another group of children.

Sexual behaviour harmful to children is not always the intention or the aim of a stragem. There are many reasons why a young person adopts harmful sexual behaviour, and both the instigator and the victim can find it difficult.

Physical signs	Behavioural signs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• stomach ache</li> <li>• pain, bleeding or discharge from genital area</li> <li>• recurring genitourinary infections</li> <li>• difficulty walking or sitting</li> <li>• sexually transmitted infections</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• absenteeism</li> <li>• sexual knowledge, language and behaviour inappropriate for the child's age</li> <li>• taxis or cars driven by people not known to be members of the child's family coming to collect child from school</li> <li>• behavioural changes</li> <li>• asks to change class</li> <li>• refuses to change for PE or sport</li> <li>• self-harms</li> <li>• afraid of or avoiding a person or group of people</li> <li>• being withdrawn</li> <li>• having unexplained money</li> <li>• sleep problems</li> <li>• makes drawings with sexual connotation</li> <li>• handwriting changes</li> </ul>

### 3. EMOTIONAL VIOLENCE

Emotional or psychological violence is the persistent psychological mistreatment of a child. It can cause serious harm to the child's health and emotional development.

All types of child mistreatment include a certain amount of psychological violence, but it can also occur on its own.

Psychological violence includes:

- Discrimination (for example on the grounds of ethnicity, nationality, gender, sexual orientation, or physical, emotional or intellectual disability) ;
- Making the child feel worthless, unloved, incompetent or only of value for satisfying another person's needs ;
- Not letting the child express their point of view ;
- Deliberately silencing them or mocking what they say or how they communicate ;
- Having inappropriate expectations with regard to the child's age or development ;
- Not listening to or completely ignoring a child ;
- Using language or behaviour that belittles the child ;
- Preventing social interaction with other adults or children ;
- Teasing or name-calling ;
- Having the child witness the serious abuse or harassment (including online) of another child or family member ;
- Frequently frightening or threatening the child ;
- Child exploitation or corruption ;
- Victimisation.

Psychological violence also includes the radicalisation of a child or young person for participation in activities linked to terrorism. Young people can also become victims of psychological violence inflicted by their peers. Violence between peers can occur face-to-face or online, by an individual or group.

Physical signs	Behavioural signs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• evidence of self-harm</li> <li>• weight or growth issues</li> <li>• delayed physical or emotional development</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• struggles to make friends</li> <li>• inappropriately seeks attention</li> <li>• appears withdrawn</li> <li>• has unexplained poor school grades</li> <li>• bed-wetting</li> <li>• sleep problems</li> <li>• tired, falling asleep in class</li> <li>• erratic behaviour</li> </ul>

#### 4. NEGLECT

Neglect is the persistent inability to meet a child's basic physical and psychological needs, with serious impacts on the child's health and development.

Neglect can occur when a child's parent or carer:

- does not provide adequate food, clothing or shelter (including not allowing them into the home or leaving them unaccompanied at home) ;
- does not protect the child from physical or emotional harm or danger ;
- does not provide adequate supervision (including being left with unsuitable people to care for them) ;
- does not provide appropriate health or medical care ;
- does not meet the child's basic emotional needs.

A neglected child is often suffering from other forms of mistreatment.

Children and young people can also be neglected by people employed to care for them, such as au pairs, nannies or chauffeurs. The children may not be receiving the care and attention they need, or may not be adequately supervised or protected from emotional harm.

In a multicultural setting, there may also be language barriers between the children and young people and those employed to care for them.

Physical signs	Behavioural signs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• untreated medical or dental problems</li> <li>• low energy due to malnourishment and/or poor diet</li> <li>• poor personal hygiene/unwashed clothing</li> <li>• inadequate clothing (not wearing warm clothes in winter)</li> <li>• untreated skin or hair conditions (rashes, sores, flea bites, headlice)</li> <li>• hollow or bloated stomach</li> <li>• constantly hungry</li> <li>• poor muscle tone (bones apparent)</li> <li>• always tired</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• constantly seeking attention and affection</li> <li>• has trouble making friends</li> <li>• often absent from school/crèche or attending irregularly</li> <li>• often arriving late</li> <li>• steals or scrounges food</li> <li>• appears withdrawn</li> <li>• has no hope or future aspirations</li> <li>• has low self-esteem</li> <li>• has poor social relations</li> <li>• alcohol or substance use</li> <li>• delayed development (weight, language, social skills)</li> </ul>

## 5. GROOMING

Grooming is a process that involves the groomer building a relationship with a child or young person with the aim of manipulating, exploiting and sexually abusing them<sup>3</sup>.

Anyone can be a groomer, regardless of age, sex or ethnicity.

Grooming can take place over a short or long period of time, from a few weeks to several years. Groomers can also build a relationship with the young person's family or friends to show themselves worthy of their trust or influence.

Children and young people can be groomed online or through direct contact or both, by a stranger or a person known to them. It can be a family member, friend or someone who has targeted them, such as a teacher, faith group leader or sports instructor. When a child is groomed online, groomers can hide their identity by sending photos or videos of other people. They might pretend to be younger than they really are to gain the trust of a 'peer'. They might target one child online or send messages to lots of children and see who responds.

A groomer can use the same websites, games and apps as young people, spend time learning about their interests and using this knowledge to build a relationship online via:

- social media ;
- text or instant messaging apps such as WhatsApp ;
- email ;
- chat forums, voice and video messaging on gaming platforms and apps.

Whether online or in person, groomers can use a number of tactics such as:

- pretending to be younger than they are ;
- offering advice or understanding ;
- buying gifts ;
- giving attention ;
- taking the child on trips, outings or holidays.

Groomers may try to isolate the child from their friends and family, making the child dependent on them in order to manipulate and control them. They might blackmail the child to make them feel guilty or ashamed, or introduce 'secrets' as a way of controlling, frightening or intimidating them.

---

<sup>3</sup> This section is taken from the NSPCC website, <https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/safeguarding-child-protection/grooming>, (viewed 15 May 2023)

It is important to be aware that children and young people might not understand that they have been groomed. They may experience a complex mix of feelings, such as loyalty, admiration and love along with fear, distress and confusion.

It may be difficult to recognise whether a child is being groomed as the signs are not always obvious and can be concealed.

Older children who have been groomed may be exhibiting “typical” teenage behaviour, hiding underlying problems.

#### Behavioural signs

- seeming tired and uninterested in school
- being over-secretive about how they are spending their time including online
- having a friendship or relationship with a much older person of same or different sex
- having unexplained money or new belongings, such as clothes or phones, and not want to or be able to explain them
- consuming alcohol/drugs
- spending more or less time online or on devices
- seeming frustrated, withdrawn or upset
- using sexual language or behaviour or having sexual understanding you would not expect them to know
- spending more time away or going missing from home or school

## 6. ABUSE BETWEEN STUDENTS

There is growing concern among experts about the increasing number of children and young people being abused by their peers. The abuse can be physical, sexual, emotional or financial, or be coercive control between peer groups.

There are never any grounds for tolerating abuse. If an Institut Florimont employee has reason to believe that a student is at risk of being harmed by another student, the employee must follow the procedures in place to share his concerns as soon as possible with the designated representative within Institut Florimont.

If an allegation of mistreatment is made against another student, all students involved (whether perpetrator or victim) will be considered to be 'at risk'.

Abuse between peers includes but is not limited to:

- Bullying<sup>4</sup> and intimidation ;
- Victimisation or discrimination (e.g. based on cultural or linguistic background, skin colour, gender, sexual orientation, or physical, emotional or intellectual vulnerability);
- Sexual assault ;
- Sexting ;
- Coercive control ;
- Initiation ceremonies (hazing or ragging) ;
- Upskirting (photographing or filming up girls' skirts).

### Behavioural signs

- skipping school
- skipping lessons
- appearing withdrawn
- asking to change class
- experiencing a conflict in family relations
- seeming anxious
- seeming aggressive or confrontational
- self-harming
- using alcohol or substances

<sup>4</sup> Bullying prevention is also covered in the Pikas Regulation.



## 7. SEXTING

Sexting is sharing sexual images or videos of oneself or others, or sending sexually explicit text messages (sexts).

Sexting has become increasingly widespread among children and teenagers who often consider it a normal element of flirting. Sexting is also viewed as a social norm by some students. It can make young people vulnerable to blackmail, harassment, unwanted attention and emotional distress.

Sexting can be illegal<sup>5</sup>. By sending a sexual image or message, a young person is producing and distributing images likely to constitute child abuse and risks legal prosecution, even if the image has been taken and shared with the subject's consent. Institut Florimont is to ensure that students are made aware of the risks associated with these practices as part of its compulsory programme on the responsible use of technology.

If an Institut Florimont employee has reason to think that a student is sexting, the adult must immediately report his concerns to the designated representative within Institut Florimont. If an allegation of abuse is made against another student, all students involved (whether perpetrator or victim) will be considered to be 'in danger'.

## 8. SELF-HARM

Self-harm is an injury that a student inflicts on himself and includes cuts, bruises, scars, hair-pulling and overdose.

The reasons why children and young people self-harm are often complicated and differ in each case. Sometimes a child or young person cannot identify the reasons for self-harming.

For many, self-harm can feel like a way of coping with difficult feelings or releasing tension. The associated physical pain feels like a distraction from the emotional suffering they experience.

---

<sup>5</sup> Giving a child under the age of 16 access to pornography is punishable, meaning that in Switzerland watching pornography under the age of 16 is illegal (Art. 197, para. 1 of the Swiss Penal Code). People under the age of 18 can also be liable for creating and/or distributing (child) pornography. When minors take nude pictures of themselves or film themselves masturbating or committing sexual acts, they are producing content of a child-pornographic nature (Art. 197, para. 4 of the Swiss Penal Code). However, between a consenting couple where both parties are over the age of 16, people can share nude images of themselves, but sharing their images with other people without consent may be penalised.

Some difficult experiences or emotions may make self-harm more likely in young people who:

- suffer from depression, anxiety or eating disorders ;
- have low self-esteem or feel that they are never good enough ;
- are bullied or feel alone ;
- suffer from emotional, physical or sexual abuse or neglect ;
- are grieving or have family problems ;
- are feeling angry, numb or unable to control their life.

It can be difficult to recognise the signs of self-harm in children and young people. Some signs to look out for are:

#### Behavioural signs

- child keeps covered up, e.g. wears long-sleeved tops even in summer
- has unexplained bruises, cuts, burns or bitemarks on the body
- has spots of blood on clothing; finding blood-stained tissues
- appears withdrawn and spends a lot of time alone
- avoids friends and family
- is depressed, has low self-esteem or gets angry with himself for certain things
- has outbursts of anger or engages in risky behaviour, e.g. consuming alcohol or drugs

### 9. SITUATIONS OF VULNERABILITY WHICH MAY INCREASE RISK OF BEING SUBJECTED TO VIOLENCE

Institut Florimont recognises that there may be situations linked to students' personal conditions which could place them in a vulnerable situation, lowering their ability to act and increasing the risk of being subjected to violence and abuse. These conditions may be linked to their background, nationality, language, religion, skin colour, gender or sexual orientation, physical ability, political beliefs or family situation.

Institut Florimont identifies and supports students with special needs , but does not tolerate any form of discrimination or violence against them, whatever the motive.

Institut Florimont considers discrimination to be equivalent to emotional violence. Reporting abuse of this kind is governed by the procedures described in section 4 of this policy.