



USP SAFEGUARDING POLICY

United School of Panama Safeguarding Policy is informed by the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of the Child, Panamanian law and the International Task Force on Child Protection (ITFCP).

Child abuse, neglect, and bullying/cyberbullying are serious concerns in schools and as they are obstacles to their education and development are not to be tolerated.

At **USP**, we promote a safe and welcoming environment in which each person is valued, cared for and protected. Child abuse and neglect are violations of a child's human rights and are obstacles to physical, emotional, and cognitive development of the child.

Educators and school staff, having the opportunity to observe and interact with students over extended periods of time, are in a unique position to identify and support "at-risk" students and circumstances. As such, schools and educators have both a professional and an ethical obligation to identify and support students who are at risk for abuse, neglect, or bullying and/or in need of support and/or protection. In addition to protecting students from abuse, neglect, and bullying/cyberbullying, schools and educators must report any knowledge of suspected or identified abusers and sex offenders.

All staff employed at **USP** must report immediately suspected incidents of child abuse or neglect whenever the staff member has reasonable cause to believe that a child has suffered or is at significant risk of suffering abuse or neglect. Reporting and follow up of all suspected incidents of child abuse or neglect will proceed in accordance with administrative regulations respective to this policy. Furthermore, cases of suspected child abuse or neglect may be reported to the appropriate employer, to the respective consulate in Panama, to the appropriate child protection agency in the home country, and/or to local authorities. **USP** seeks to be a safe haven for students who may be experiencing abuse or neglect in any aspect of their lives. As such, **USP** will distribute this policy annually to all parents and applicants, will communicate this policy annually to students, will provide training for all staff, and will make every effort to implement



hiring practices to ensure the safety of children. Each **USP** staff member will have to undergo a background check before they start working at **USP**.

In the case of an accusation, **USP** will conduct a full investigation following a carefully designed course of due process, keeping the safety of the child at the highest priority. All **USP** employees (faculty, office and support staff), Extra Curricular Activities (ECA) contractors and providers are required to read, acknowledge, and adhere to the school's Safeguarding Policy and annually sign the school's Code of Conduct document.

Definition of Forms of Student Abuse/Threats to Safety (Hereinafter "Abuse"):

1. **Physical Abuse:** Intentional (non-accidental) physical injury of a student by another student, a parent, a person responsible for the care of the child, or any member of the **USP** community.
2. **Sexual Abuse:** a) Any unwanted/non-consensual sexual activity or situation between students is not accepted and is considered sexual abuse. b) Any sexual activity/advancement/verbal interaction, suggestion or situation involving any adult community member or a person responsible for the care of the child is considered as sexual abuse.
3. **Emotional Abuse:** An act of commission or omission by a student, a parent, a person responsible for the care of the child, or any member of the **USP** community that significantly impairs the emotional well-being of the affected student. Such behaviors include humiliation; threats to injure or withdraw physical or emotional support; isolation from social contacts; and withholding things necessary for mental health such as respect, security, limits, attention, affection and love.
4. **Physical Neglect:** Withholding (by a parent, a person responsible for the care of the child, or any member of the **USP** community) of those things necessary for the student's health and normal development. This includes adequate food, clothing, shelter, sleep, supervision, medical treatment and/or education.



5. **Psychological Neglect:** Neglect occurs when a student is isolated, ignored, when nurturing is repeatedly withheld, or when ongoing adequate time/attention is not given to the student from parents, a person responsible for the care of the child, or any member of the **USP** community.
6. **Bullying/Cyberbullying:** Any repeated interactions, contact, actions, or attitudes communicated by a member of the **USP** community which make a student feel threatened, humiliated, or unsafe.

Reporting Procedures for Abuse:

USP requires that all members of the community familiarize themselves with these reporting requirements in the event that they witness or become aware of Student Abuse/endorsement. Expectations for reporting include acting with tact, confidentiality, and sympathy; avoiding “over-questioning” of the victim; and assembling complete and detailed notes (including date and time of any observations or conversations with the student) immediately.

1. Any member of the **USP** community **USP** employees (faculty, office and support staff, Extra Curricular Activities (ECA) contractors, providers), parent or student that experiences, observes, or receives a report of signs and/or behaviors that suggest abuse or a violation of the spirit of the school’s code of conduct must immediately notify the academic director or coordinator.
2. The Academic Coordinator in consultation with the Academic Director, and the reporting faculty or community member must review, organize, and document all data points.
3. Three potential case scenarios are addressed in this policy:
“No Grounds” case – The Academic Director and Academic Coordinator, will make a written report and recommendation stating that there are no grounds for the Abuse allegations or a violation of the spirit of the code of conduct then the result of the case will be officially documented. The gathered information and a record of discussions held will be kept on file and electronically available for Board members to access/refer to as needed.



“Suspicion Remains” case – If evidence is lacking or incomplete but suspicion for abuse remains then the Academic Director and Coordinator, will maintain confidential timed and dated notes as well as meet regularly to follow up and evaluate any further developments in the case in question. Disclosure of ongoing cases of suspected abuse will be reported to the Board and the involved parents/guardians as soon as possible. The gathered information will be kept on file and periodic updates, in writing, will be provided to the Board as the circumstances of the case merit.

“Abuse Likely or Confirmed” case – If documented evidence suggests abuse (including that which is alleged to have occurred off campus) the Academic Director, following written disclosure to and approval from the Board of Directors, will immediately report cases of suspected Abuse to the appropriate authorities. Such authorities may include the alleged perpetrator’s employer and/or embassy, the appropriate child protection agency in the home country of the alleged perpetrator, and in accordance with Panamanian law the appropriate local authorities. The Academic Director, in consultation with the Board and legal/professional advisors, will take all actions necessary to ensure the safety of the student and the community.

4. In the case of abuse, the Academic Director will determine the appropriate course of action for the protection of the victim and discipline for the perpetrator. The gathered information will be kept on file and timely periodic updates, in writing, will be provided to the Board as the circumstances/status of the case merits.

5. All other **USP** community members will be informed of reported abuse allegations on a need to know basis only. Parents of the student(s) involved in reported abuse allegations will be notified as early in the process as is appropriate for the safety and security of all involved parties. Any additional written information/observations from other personnel will be included in documentation.

6. All **USP** community members are expected to report any knowledge of suspected or identified child abusers or sex offenders within the school community. In the event that an **USP** community member is alleged or discovered to be an abuser or sex offender, **USP** will conduct a full investigation and involve the appropriate authorities. The investigation shall proceed in accordance with the administrative reporting procedure outlined in this policy.



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USP is committed to protecting each of its students in every aspect of school life. As such, USP distributes this policy annually to all community members through Faculty Handbooks, Faculty and Divisional information sessions/meetings, Parent-Student Handbooks, and the public USP school website.