

IISD-ELA Safeguarding and Protection of Children Policy

Purpose

IISD Experimental Lakes Area (IISD-ELA) believes it is always unacceptable for a child or youth to experience abuse of any kind and recognizes its responsibility to safeguard the welfare of all children and youth with whom it comes into contact through the course of its work. IISD-ELA expects all board directors, employees, volunteers, associates, and consultants (IISD-ELA representatives) to share this commitment.

The purpose of this policy is to

- provide a framework by which IISD-ELA carries out its duty to protect children and youth from harm,
- raise awareness among all IISD-ELA representatives of their responsibilities to safeguard children and to identify any obligations for reporting possible cases of abuse, and
- develop a safeguarding culture within the organization, so IISD-ELA staff and partners feel informed and supported in their work-related connections with children.

Scope

This policy applies to all IISD-ELA representatives, including board directors, employees, volunteers, associates, and consultants.

IISD-ELA's safeguarding focus is on children because IISD-ELA representatives come into regular contact with children, particularly through the educational programs it hosts for high school students at the IISD-ELA site, and occasionally at meetings where it provides independent reporting of the proceedings.

While some definitions of safeguarding also include vulnerable adults, IISD-ELA is not a humanitarian agency that provides direct aid to people. It does not work in direct service of elderly adults or those who have mental health issues or learning difficulties. IISD-ELA is not active in conflict zones or post-disaster relief efforts, although some teams work with communities that are vulnerable to conflict and climate change.

Definitions

Safeguarding is a term used to denote measures to protect the health, well-being, and human rights of individuals, which allow people—especially children, youth, and vulnerable adults—to live free from abuse, harm, and neglect. For the purposes of this policy, safeguarding is defined as protecting children from abuse.

Children refers to people under the age of 18; the terms “children” or “child” in this policy are inclusive of children and youth.

Abuse includes any act that endangers a child's physical or emotional well-being, including physical, emotional, or sexual abuse, and neglect.

Boundary violations refer to behaviours or actions that cross professional or ethical lines, potentially putting individuals at risk or creating uncomfortable or unsafe situations.

Vulnerable adults are defined as adults who are elderly and frail; have mental health issues, a physical disability, learning difficulties; or are made vulnerable by an emergency situation.

IISD-ELA representative(s) includes board directors, employees, volunteers, associates, and consultants.

Prospective IISD-ELA representative(s) includes any individuals that are applying to be a member of an IISD-ELA representative group (board directors, employees, volunteers, associates, and consultants).

Policy

Safeguarding Standards

IISD-ELA representatives are expected to ensure their behaviour is always appropriate and in line with IISD-ELA’s commitment to safeguarding children. It is essential that all staff, volunteers, and associates understand what constitutes misconduct to maintain a safe environment.

All IISD-ELA representatives must

- treat children with dignity and respect,
- maintain appropriate boundaries with children,
- ensure their behaviour is appropriate and would not raise concerns in the mind of a reasonable observer or family/community member,
- ensure their behaviour could not reasonably be regarded as posing a risk to the personal integrity or security of a child or contribute to a child’s discomfort, and
- treat all allegations of abuse or misconduct seriously. It is everyone’s duty to report allegations or suspicions and to follow established procedures when reporting allegations of abuse or misconduct.

The following examples include instances of child abuse as well as boundary violations. These actions, among others, are considered unacceptable and will not be tolerated under any circumstances:

- Engaging in any activity that puts a child in physical or psychological jeopardy.

- Engaging in any form of sexual abuse or exploitation of any person of any age and specifically, having sexual relations with any person under the age of 18.
- Engaging in any sort of physical contact with a child that may make the child, or a reasonable observer, feel uncomfortable, or that may be seen by a reasonable observer to be violating sensible boundaries. This includes touching a child in a manner that is not in response to meeting a child's needs or touching a child in any way that could be considered sexual in nature.
- Making any sort of remark, comment, or joke to/regarding a child that is in any way suggestive, explicit, sexual, or demeaning.
- Communicating with a child within or outside of work in a manner that may make the child, parent, or legal guardian uncomfortable, or may be seen by a reasonable observer to be violating sensible boundaries (e.g., writing personal letters or social networking).
- Transporting a single child in a vehicle (there should be two or more children or adults in a vehicle when transporting children).
- Taking photos of children without a signed written consent by parents/guardians. This includes taking photos of children participating in activities on site at IISD-ELA and taking pictures of children at meetings IISD-ELA is covering as a reporting service unless they are speaking or demonstrating in public, have been brought in front of media by their parents or guardians, or are otherwise seeking media attention in a way that privacy cannot reasonably be expected.

Prevention

Background Checks

The IISD-ELA Safeguarding and Protection of Children Procedure: Background Checks explains detailed steps for IISD-ELA representatives who work with children.

Prospective IISD-ELA representatives who will work with children or undertake indirect responsibilities for children must undergo a criminal background check, including vulnerable sector screening, which may include an enhanced criminal record check intended for individuals seeking employment or volunteer opportunities with vulnerable persons; and a child abuse registry check, where such a registry exists.

IISD-ELA representatives who have direct supervision or indirect responsibilities for children must undergo criminal background checks and child abuse registry checks on a regular basis. These checks will be conducted every 3 years to ensure continued compliance with this policy.

Policies

IISD-ELA has related policies designed to offer protection to people from abuse, exploitation, and harm.

The IISD-ELA Code of Conduct must be signed by all IISD-ELA representatives and contains IISD-ELA's commitment to child protection and to treating all people with respect and dignity.

IISD-ELA's board of directors are required to sign an acknowledgement form to demonstrate that the IISD-ELA Code of Conduct has been read and understood and that they are unaware of any conflicts of interest at the start of each term of service.

IISD-ELA also has policies that explain the institute's commitment to workplaces free of harassment and violence, and a whistleblower policy to ensure that breaches of these policies can be reported without any fear of reprisal. These policies are established and maintained to set the rules of behaviour and to create a positive and safe working environment.

Reporting

IISD-ELA understands that IISD-ELA representatives may be the first to become aware of any conduct that may be unethical, illegal, or fraudulent. IISD-ELA is committed to supporting IISD-ELA representatives in raising legitimate issues in an open and honest way, without fear of negative consequences.

As such, the IISD-ELA Safeguarding and Protection of Children Procedure: Reporting a Child in Need of Protection provides guidance for reporting a child in need of protection, whether the concern arises from misconduct by an IISD-ELA representative or from the child's personal life. The purpose of these procedures is to ensure that all IISD-ELA representatives know the steps for reporting suspected child abuse and boundary violations.

These procedures are also designed to help IISD-ELA representatives meet their legal obligations, recognizing that there may be legal requirements to report suspected child abuse depending on the region where IISD-ELA operates. Such requirements may also extend to an obligation to report neglect of children; therefore, these procedures provide guidance for reporting a child in need of protection from abuse, boundary violations, or neglect.

The procedures include the following details:

- IISD's Director, People and Culture, is the organization's designated senior safeguarding officer. People can make confidential complaints by email or by phone to the senior safeguarding officer, without any fear of reprisal.
- In situations where IISD-ELA representatives prefer to place an anonymous report in confidence, they can access the ethics hotline, EthicsPoint, hosted by a third-party hotline provider, NAVEX Global. Procedures are set out in the IISD-ELA Safeguarding and Protection of Children Procedure: Reporting a Child in Need of Protection and in the IISD-ELA Whistleblower Policy.

Compliance

Violation of this policy will result in disciplinary action up to and including dismissal. In cases where the behaviour is illegal or warrants further investigation, the matter will be presented to legal authorities. IISD-ELA takes these matters very seriously and will act promptly to ensure the safety and well-being of all children.

Related Policies, Procedures, and Guidelines

- IISD-ELA Code of Conduct
- IISD-ELA Whistleblower Policy
- IISD-ELA Safeguarding and Protection of Children Procedure: Reporting a Child in Need of Protection
- IISD-ELA Safeguarding and Protection of Children Procedure: Background Checks

Policy Review and Revision

Review cycle: This policy will be reviewed regularly, and at least every 5 years by the policy owner to ensure its relevance and accuracy.

Revision history:

Date	Version	Description of Changes	Approved By
June 16, 2026	1.0	Initial policy release, in the IISD-ELA template	IISD-ELA Board through a Board Resolution