

## Zhuhai International School

### Safeguarding in remote and blended learning environments

The safeguarding risks associated with *remote* and *blended* learning are similar to those associated with *in-person* learning. These include peer on peer harm, which is the physical, emotional or sexual harm between students and grooming and abuse by a member of staff. Most forms of harm can take place online as well as offline. In remote working environments and situations of self-isolation or quarantine, online harm and harm to students living in abusive home environments are particular considerations.

ZIS will encourage students to let their teacher, Head of Section, or counsellor know if they feel unsafe in a virtual classroom, session or forum and to report wider concerns to any staff member with whom they feel comfortable.

It is the responsibility of all ZIS stakeholders to *prevent* and *respond* to inappropriate, harmful and illegal content online.

The goals of safeguarding in remote and blended learning include:

- keeping young people safe from online harm,
- making sure that the institution's online and virtual activities align with its values and comply with relevant laws, and
- ensuring parents, staff and students are aware of expected and appropriate behaviours, and reporting mechanisms.

### How to Respond? Lines of Communication

Q. *How should **staff** respond if they see harmful or inappropriate content shared online?*

A. The appropriate response will depend on individual circumstances and professional judgement. Action could include, for example, deleting inappropriate comments, removing content from an online forum, removing all participants from a class and/or escalating concerns in accordance with ZIS Child Protection Policies. Communicating with Head of Section, the Child Protection Officer, and/or the Head of School enables ZIS to spot patterns and identify harm at an early stage.

Q. *How should **students** respond if they see harmful or inappropriate content shared online?*

A. Students should let their parents, teacher, Head of Section, or counsellor know if they feel unsafe in a virtual classroom, session or forum and to report wider concerns to any staff member with whom they feel comfortable.

Q. *How should **parents** respond if they see harmful or inappropriate content shared online?*

A. Parents should let their teacher, Head of Section, or Head of School know if their child feels unsafe in a virtual classroom, session or forum and to report wider concerns to the Head of School and/or Child Protection Officer.

### **Identifying signs of concern**

Some signs to be aware of include:

- Preoccupation and excessive worry;
- Showing emotional and behavioral interference/paralysis and showing signs of not being able to cope;
- Avoidance of responsibilities or relationships;
- Perseverance - meaning that the student cannot move away from their thoughts or are chronically thinking about risk and threat; and
- Ruminates - thinking too deeply about the situation.

If students are showing these signs, then staff and parents should consult and follow the channels of communication set out above and in the ZIS Child Protection Policy. As part of this, staff might decide to refer the student to counselling that can be delivered virtually, whether by the institution or an external service.

Existing codes of conduct, behaviour codes and acceptable use policies for students and staff apply equally to *in-person* and *online* behaviour. In remote or blended learning circumstances it is important to remember:

**Online interactions** – existing expectations and protocols established in school also apply to the sharing of content on online platforms and during virtual classrooms;

**Professional boundaries** - staff should maintain the same professional boundaries with students *online* as they are required to maintain *in person*;

**Appropriate location to join a virtual classroom** - a neutral location (i.e. not a bedroom or bathroom) in a common area in the house is preferable and, for school students and any non-confidential one-to-one sessions, somewhere that is within earshot of parents or other people in the student's residence (see below);

**Appropriate dress code when joining a virtual classroom** – students are not required to wear school uniform but are expected to be suitably clothed following the spirit of the uniform code. Teachers are required to abide by the same guidelines for dress as followed on campus.

**Digital communications between students and staff** – exchanges are restricted to messages which have an educational purpose. All digital communications between students and staff are to be conducted via an institutional email or video-conferencing account.

### **Safeguarding for all in online one-to-one sessions**

Online communications, remote learning and virtual one-to-one sessions can increase the blurring of professional boundaries. Mindful of the increased risks associated with one-to-one settings ZIS follows these guidelines:

Non-essential one-to-one educational sessions are to be postponed.  
**Please note that counselling sessions should not be postponed;**

Inform the Head of Section and/or Head of School of the timing, location and reason of the session in advance and sending confirmation of it after;

Requiring the session to take place in a common area that is within earshot of another person in the student's residence. For counselling or other confidential sessions, the student should, where possible, be located in a room which is private, but which is not a bedroom or bathroom. If a student cannot avoid taking a counselling session from

their bedroom, the counsellor will consider holding the session with audio only, not video;

Ensuring that the student knows that they can stop the session at any time and how to raise a concern or get help if needed;

Ensuring that staff know how to raise a concern about the session, and that it is their responsibility to maintain appropriate professional boundaries;

Ensuring that counsellors have a safety plan in place for students in distress or at risk of harm, which sets out what steps should be taken to support the student in this online environment.

Do **not** record any virtual *counselling* sessions.

### **Recording online sessions**

In the interests of guarding student privacy, the recording of online sessions should only be done if it is only do so if it is considered necessary and proportionate, after conducting a written risk assessment approved by the Head of Section. The data protection policy and all school policies must be considered. Any risk assessment should weigh up the risks of recording against the risks of not recording. The inadvertent recording or disclosure of confidential information should be included in the risks associated with recording. It is required that students, and their parents or carers, are informed and are aware that the educational session will be recorded, and how the recording will be used.