Managing violence in schools

Handbook for Schools and Learning Centres

Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC 2025)

Federal Ministry of **Education**

UNIVERSAL BASIC EDUCATION COMMISSION
EST. 2004
EDUCATION FOR DEVELOPMENT

Contents

Acronyms

CRC:	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CCT:	Code of Conduct Tribunal
CSAM:	Child Sexual Abuse Material
FME:	Federal Ministry of Education
GBV:	Gender-Based Violence
ILO:	International Labour Organization
LGEA:	Local Government Education Authority
NGOs:	Non-governmental organizations
NMEC:	National Commission for Mass Literacy, Adult & Non-formal Education
NPE:	National Policy on Education
NPCP:	National Policy on Child Protection
OCSEA:	Online Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse
PTA:	Parent–Teacher Association
SBMC:	School-Based Management Committee
SDG:	Sustainable Development Goals
SGBV:	Sexual and Gender-Based Violence
SRGV:	School-Related Gender-Based Violence
SMOE:	State Ministry of Education
STEAM:	Science Technology Engineering Arts and Mathematics
TRCN:	Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria
UBE:	Universal Basic Education
UBEC:	Universal Basic Education Commission
UNCRC:	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
UNESCO:	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF:	United Nations Children's Fund

Foreword

Education is a cornerstone of development and progress. Schools are expected to be safe havens where learners can learn and grow. The prevalence of physical violence in many schools across Nigeria has become an issue to be given attention to, as it undermines learners' educational experience.

Therefore, this book, Managing Violence in Schools; Handbook for Schools and Learning Centres, seeks to address these critical concerns by exploring efective strategies for fostering a violence-free learning environment.

The essence of this book lies in its commitment to ensuring that schools and learning centres become safe spaces for every learner, recognizing that no learner should have to face physical harm in their pursuit of education, by providing insights into causes, efects, and solutions to physical violence in schools. The work aims to equip educators, policymakers, and stakeholders with practical tools to combat this negative trend.

Globally, the eforts to manage violence in schools have been noteworthy. Nations like Finland, Sweden, and Canada have implemented policies emphasizing conflict resolutions, anti-bullying campaigns, and inclusive education. These examples serve as valuable lessons for Nigeria as we strive to create a safer educational environment for learners.

Special acknowledgment must be given to UNICEF and other development partners for their unwavering dedication to the rights and welfare of children. The advocacy for safe and inclusive education has been a beacon of hope for countless communities worldwide.

In Nigeria, the collective eforts of stakeholders, especially the development partners, to reduce school violence and promote child-friendly policies have been instrumental in shaping the strategies outlined in this book.

This book is therefore a call to action. It is a reminder that safeguarding our children's education is not just a responsibility, it is a moral imperative. By working together, we can ensure that schools and learning centres become places where every learner feels secure, valued, and empowered to achieve their full potential.

The efective use of this handbook undoubtedly will enhance the achievement of safe and violence-free schools where learners can have wholesome development.

Hajiya Aisha Garba
Executive Secretary, Universal Basic Education Commission

Acknowledgements

Introduction

Ensuring a safe and supportive learning environment for all learners is fundamental to the educational mission of schools. Children, as the most vulnerable members of society, deserve protection from all forms of harm, including violence, abuse and neglect. School-based violence is a global issue that threatens not only the well-being of learners but also their academic success, emotional development and future opportunities.

In Nigeria, for example, the Child Rights Act (2003) domesticated the principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, providing a legal foundation for child protection within the country. Additionally, the National Policy for Safety, Security, and Violence-Free Schools and the Minimum Standards for Safe Schools further reinforce the importance of a safe learning environment for students and teachers.

Despite these legal frameworks, school-based violence remains a pervasive issue both globally and nationally. It manifests in various forms, including physical, sexual, and psychological abuse, bullying, and gender-based violence. Cultural norms, inadequate reporting mechanisms, and lack of awareness often hinder efforts to address these problems. School-based violence, including physical, emotional, and sexual abuse, is a significant issue in Nigeria.

Addressing school-based violence requires shifting cultural attitudes, improving teacher training on non-violent disciplinary methods, and enforcing child protection laws uniformly across Nigeria. By creating safer educational environments, stakeholders can ensure children's rights are upheld, setting the stage for more efective violence prevention strategies.

This handbook seeks to provide learners, headteachers, teachers, schools, and learning centre managers with practical strategies to prevent and address school-based violence, ensuring a safer, more inclusive environment for all learners.

This handbook is designed to be a practical guide for everyday use. Teachers and staf can refer to the strategies outlined to identify, prevent, and respond to various forms of violence in school settings. The handbook can be used during teacher training sessions, incorporated into school policies, or used as a resource for immediate reference during incidents.

Chapter one: Understanding school-based violence

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School-based violence is "any form of physical, psychological, or sexual violence occurring in and around schools". This includes violence committed by learners, teachers, or other staff members, and it encompasses acts that occur on school property, during school events, or on the way to and from school.

School-based violence refers to violence that takes place in a school setting. This includes violence that occurs on school property, on the way to or from school, and at school trips and events. It may be committed by learners, teachers, other members of the school staf, family or community members; however, violence by fellow learners is the most common.

Forms of school-based violence

School-based violence can take many forms. This includes:

- Corporal punishment, which is defined as the intentional infliction of physical pain as a method of discipline or correction, typically used to punish a child's misbehaviour. It involves physical force that causes bodily pain but is not intended to result in physical injury. This includes actions such as spanking, slapping, or hitting with objects like belts, paddles or sticks. The purpose is often to deter unwanted behaviour or to teach a lesson.

- Physical violence, which includes any kind of physical aggression, and the use of weapons, as well as violence caused through criminal acts like theft or arson.

- Psychological violence, which includes emotional and verbal abuse. This may involve insulting, threatening, ignoring, isolating, rejecting, name-calling, humiliating, ridiculing, rumormongering, lying, or punishing another person.

- Sexual and gender-based violence, which includes sexual harassment, sexual intimidation, unwanted touching, sexual coercion, and rape.

- Bullying, which can take physical, psychological or sexual forms and is characterized by repeated and intentional aggression towards another person.

- Cyberbullying, which includes sexual or psychological abuse by people connected through school on social media or other online platforms. This may involve posting false information, hurtful comments, malicious rumours, or embarrassing photos or videos online. Cyberbullying can also take the form of excluding someone from online groups or networks.
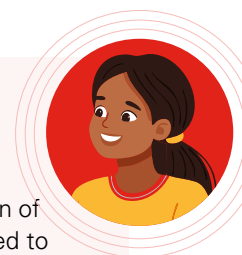
Victims of school-based violence

While teaching/non-teaching staf, and learners are exposed to all types of school-based violence, learners in the schools are the primary victims of school-based violence. Girls and boys experience school related violence at diferent times, depending on their vulnerability levels.

Children who are victims of school violence may be physically injured and experience cuts, scrapes, bruises, broken bones, gunshot wounds, concussions, physical disability, or death.

Emotionally, such children might experience depression, anxiety, or rage, which can indirectly afect their academic performance due to di culties concentrating on their studies, when all they can think about is how to avoid being hurt again.

Children who may have experienced school violence are at risk of long-term mental and physical health conditions, including attachment disorders, substance abuse, obesity, diabetes, cancer, heart disease, respiratory conditions, and even drop-out.

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Causes of school-based violence

The following can be the causes of school-based violence;

Gender-based beliefs:

The following can be the causes of school-based violence:

- **Harmful belief:** For example, "Boys are naturally better at mathematics and science, while girls excel in humanities and arts".

  Impact: belief fosters a competitive and exclusionary environment. When boys receive more attention and encouragement, girls may feel marginalized, leading to frustration and a lack of confidence. This disparity can manifest in verbal or emotional aggression among learners, where girls may feel compelled to assert themselves in unhealthy ways to gain recognition in traditionally male-dominated subjects. Over time, this can lead to a culture where bullying or undermining behaviors are more common as learners vie for attention and a rmation.

- **Cultural norm:** In some communities, it is expected that boys should be more assertive and girls more passive.

  Impact: This can afect how teachers handle classroom interactions. Boys might be encouraged to speak up for example, but if girls do, it could be seen as being out of line.

Disciplinary practices:

- **Harmful belief:** Most teachers and parents believe that corporal punishment is the most efective way to discipline learners and maintain order.

  Impact: Teachers who hold this belief may use physical punishment, which can harm learners emotionally and physically, perpetuating a culture of violence in the school.

- **Cultural norm:** In some cultures, elders and authority figures (like teachers) are rarely questioned or challenged.

  Impact: This can lead to a classroom dynamic where learners are discouraged from speaking up about mistreatment or violence because challenging a teacher is seen as disrespectful.

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Socioeconomic biases:

These are beliefs that are associated with societal status.

- **Harmful belief:** Many teachers believe that learners from poor backgrounds are less likely to succeed academically.

  Impact: Teachers' low expectations can discourage learners from low-income backgrounds, leading to feelings of worthlessness and frustration. This emotional turmoil can manifest as aggression, either as a defense mechanism or as a means of expressing dissatisfaction with their treatment. Moreover, the gap in attention and resources may result in tensions and conflicts among learners from diferent socioeconomic backgrounds, potentially leading to bullying or physical altercations.

How to address the beliefs and cultural norms related to school-based violence

- **Sensitization and awareness:** Create awareness both in and out of school for teachers, learners, and parents highlighting the negative efects of gender stereotypes in education. Highlight success stories to counteract stereotypes.

- **Encourage inclusivity:** Create mixed-gender study groups for subjects like mathematics and science to foster collaboration and diminish competitive exclusion.

- **Classroom dynamics:** Encourage teachers to actively involve all learners in discussions and ensure equal participation, challenging traditional gender roles.

- **Alternative discipline training:** Ofer training for teachers on positive discipline strategies focusing on restorative practices and conflict resolution rather than punitive measures.

- **Open communication:** Establish a classroom culture where questioning and discussing authority respectfully is encouraged. Create an anonymous reporting system for learners to express concerns about mistreatment.

- **Empowerment programs:** Implement programs that empower learners to voice their opinions and concerns, reinforcing that their perspectives are important.

- **Equitable treatment:** Train teachers to recognize and address biases in their treatment of learners. Promote a culture of respect and value for every learner, regardless of background and gender.

- **Community building:** Encourage activities that promote collaboration among learners from diverse backgrounds, fostering understanding and respect.

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Chapter two: Addressing corporal punishment

Corporal punishment refers to the physical discipline of learners by teachers, administrators, or other school personnel. Corporal punishment is the most common form of violence against children worldwide. It includes any punishment in which physical force is used and intended to cause some degree of pain or discomfort, however light, as well as non-physical forms of punishment that are cruel and degrading.

Types of corporal punishment

- **Spanking or slapping:** Hitting a learner with an open hand on the buttocks, arms, or legs.
- **Paddling:** Striking a learner with a wooden paddle or similar object on the buttocks.
- **Caning:** Using a cane or rod to hit a learner, typically on the hands or back.
- **Hitting with objects:** Using belts, rulers, or other objects to strike a learner.
- **Forced physical exertion:** Requiring a learner to perform strenuous physical activities as punishment, such as running laps or doing push-ups.
- **Standing in stressful positions:** Forcing a learner to stand in uncomfortable or painful positions for extended periods.

Common signs to identify victims of corporal punishment

Corporal punishment can manifest both physically and emotionally in learners. Here are some common signs:

Physical signs

- **Bruises, welts or scars:** Unexplained marks on the skin, especially in areas like the arms, legs, back or buttocks.
- **Burns or cuts:** Unusual injuries that do not match typical accidents or play activities.
- **Swelling or tenderness:** In areas that might indicate recent injury from physical punishment.
- **Di culty sitting or standing:** This could indicate recent blows or trauma to the lower body.

- **Frequent injuries:** A pattern of recurring injuries or frequent visits to the school nurse may suggest abuse.
- **Hesitation to change clothes or participate in physical activities:** Learners might avoid activities like gym class or swimming to hide visible injuries.

Behavioural signs
- **Withdrawal from social interaction:** Learners might become more isolated, avoiding contact with peers or teachers.
- **Fearful or anxious behaviour:** A child may appear overly afraid of adults or authority figures, especially in contexts where they might anticipate punishment.
- **Aggression or disruptive behaviour:** Some children react to corporal punishment by lashing out, displaying anger, or being more aggressive towards others.
- **Sudden drop in academic performance:** A decline in school performance or concentration can be a sign of distress or anxiety related to violence.
- **Reluctance to go home or talk about home:** Learners might express fear or discomfort about returning   home after school.

Negative effects of corporal punishment on learners

Corporal punishment can have several long-lasting efects on learners' emotional, social and academic development.

- **Corporal punishment often leads to fear, anxiety and trauma in learners.** It can create a hostile learning environment where learners are constantly afraid of making mistakes.
- **Aggressive behaviour:** It is believed that learners who experience corporal punishment are more likely to display aggressive and violent behaviours, both in and out of school. This perpetuates a cycle of violence.
- **Lower academic performance and drop-out:** Fear of punishment can distract learners from learning. Learners who are physically punished may also develop a negative attitude toward school, leading to disengagement, poor academic performance, and even drop-out.
- **Damage to teacher-learner relationships:** Corporal punishment undermines trust and respect between teachers and learners. Learners may become resentful and less likely to approach teachers for help or guidance.
- **Damage to learner-learner relationships:** By fostering aggression and hostility, corporal punishment can lead to more conflict among peers. It reduces trust and empathy, making learners more likely to withdraw or become defensive. Victims of corporal punishment may feel isolated and develop low self-esteem, which can hinder their ability to build or maintain friendships.
- **Low self-esteem and mental health issues:** Learners who are frequently subjected to corporal punishment are more likely to sufer from low self-esteem, depression, and anxiety. These issues can persist into adulthood, afecting their future well-being.

Few teachers argue that learners demonstrate a positive change of behavior when corporal punishment is used, but the negative efects on the students outweigh the positive changes.

Why corporal punishment

Despite the negative efects, most teachers still carry out corporal punishment for various reasons..

- **Corporal Punishment is not prohibited:** The Child Rights Act doesn't explicitly prohibit corporal punishment in schools in Nigeria. Although there have been repeated recommendations on the prohibition of corporal punishment for children, there are no strict and explicit laws prohibiting it.
- **Cultural acceptance:** In most communities, corporal punishment is culturally accepted as a normal method of discipline, both at home and in schools. Most teachers reflect the societal beliefs that corporal punishment is necessary for controlling behaviour.
- **Immediate results:** Teachers often believe that corporal punishment results in immediate compliance, as learners may quickly stop unwanted behaviour out of fear.
- **Lack of training on alternative discipline:** Many teachers lack the knowledge or skills to implement positive discipline strategies. Without proper training in classroom management, they may feel corporal punishment is the only tool available.
- **Perceived authority:** Corporal punishment may be viewed as asserting authority and maintaining control over the classroom, particularly in large or di cult classes.
- **Stress and frustration:** Teachers under pressure, whether from overcrowded classrooms, lack of resources, or stress, may resort to corporal punishment out of frustration when they feel they cannot manage the learner's behaviour efectively.
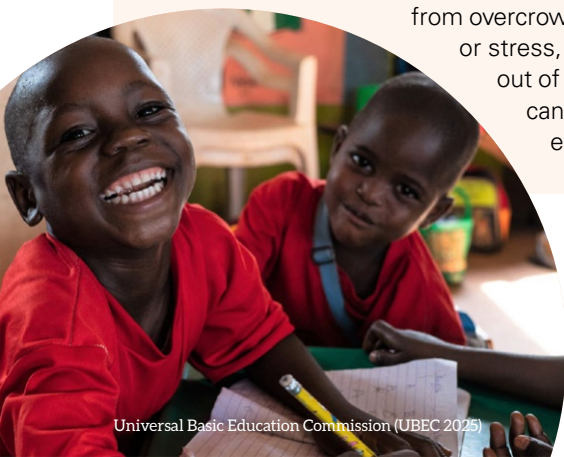
Positive discipline

Positive discipline focuses on teaching learners appropriate behaviour and fostering self-discipline in a respectful and supportive environment. It shifts the focus from punishment to guidance, helping learners learn from their mistakes and take responsibility for their actions.

Tips for teachers in managing students' behavior in classrooms

- Involve learners in creating classroom rules and expectations. This increases their sense of ownership and responsibility for their behaviour.
- Clearly explain the rules and consequences for breaking them. Consistently apply these rules to ensure fairness and transparency.
- Rather than focusing solely on punishment, celebrate learners who follow the rules. Acknowledge good behaviour through verbal praise, certificates or privileges.
- Build rapport by showing interest in learners' lives, listening to their concerns, and ofering encouragement. Positive teacher-learner relationships foster trust and respect.
- Demonstrate the behaviour you want to see in learners. Model kindness, patience and respect in your interactions with them and others.
- Encourage learners to express their thoughts and feelings openly. This can help to reduce the likelihood of misbehaviour.
- Recognize and reward learners when they meet behavioural expectations. This can be through praise, certificates, or a class reward system like earning extra recess time.

- Acknowledge even small positive changes in behaviour. Consistent reinforcement of good behaviour builds a positive classroom culture.

- Teach learners how to resolve disputes peacefully through communication and compromise. Teachers can create a safe space for open talks and teach them to listen to each other and express their feelings calmly.

- Encourage problem-solving by letting learners brainstorm solutions together and learn to compromise. Help them stay calm during conflicts and praise them when they resolve issues peacefully.

- Role-playing activities can help learners practice resolving conflicts in a controlled setting.

- Group activities and collaborative projects can help learners develop teamwork and social skills while promoting a positive classroom culture.

Chapter three: managing bullying in schools

Bullying is intentional, aggressive behaviour that involves an imbalance of power or strength. It can be physical, verbal or psychological and is often repeated over time. Bullying can take place in person or through digital platforms, such as social media, which is known as cyberbullying. The primary goal of bullying is to harm, control or intimidate the victim.

Types of bullying

- **Physical bullying:** Involves harming someone's body or possessions. Examples include hitting, kicking, pushing, or damaging someone's belonging.
- **Verbal bullying:** Includes saying or writing mean things. This can involve teasing, name-calling, inappropriate sexual comments, taunting, or threatening to cause harm.
- **Social bullying (relational bullying):** Hurting someone's reputation or relationships. This includes spreading rumours, intentionally excluding someone from a group, or embarrassing someone in public.
- **Cyberbullying:** Bullying that occurs through digital devices like computers, smartphones and tablets. It includes sending threatening or mean messages, spreading rumours online, or sharing someone's private information without consent.
- **Emotional/psychological bullying:** It involves actions that target a person's emotions or social standing, often leaving no visible signs but causing deep emotional distress.

Effect of Bullying in Schools

- **Fear and anxiety:** Victims of bullying often live in constant fear of being targeted, which afects their ability to focus on learning and participate in school activities.
- **Social isolation:** Victims may withdraw from peers, avoiding social interactions to escape bullying. This isolation can lead to feelings of loneliness and depression, creating an unhealthy school climate.
- **Decreased academic performance:** When learners are emotionally distressed, they are less likely to engage in their studies, leading to a drop in academic performance and disengagement from school.
- **Increased conflict:** Emotional bullying can create an atmosphere of distrust and division among learners, leading to conflicts and a breakdown of positive relationships within the school community.

Warning signs for recognizing victims of bullying

It is important to recognize the warning signs of bullying in victims, as they may not always report the abuse themselves.

- **Withdrawal from peers:** Victims of bullying often become socially isolated, avoiding interactions with classmates and participating less in group activities.
- **Sudden changes in behaviour:** Victims may become anxious or depressed or exhibit mood swings. A once outgoing learner may suddenly appear quiet, withdrawn, or fearful.
- **Unexplained injuries or lost belongings:** Physical bullying may leave visible marks, while victims of other forms of bullying may frequently report lost or damaged belongings without explanation.
- **Decline in academic performance:** Bullying can lead to a lack of concentration and motivation, resulting in lower grades and disengagement from schoolwork.
- **Frequent absences:** Victims may attempt to avoid school entirely to escape bullying, resulting in higher rates of absenteeism or tardiness.
- **Decrease in or loss of self-care behaviours** (lack of eating, no longer brushing hair or self-grooming, etc.)

Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying refers to the use of digital technology (such as social media, messaging platforms, gaming sites, and mobile phones) to harass, threaten, or humiliate someone. In schools, cyberbullying can have serious efects on a learner's mental health, emotional well-being, and academic performance, as it extends beyond the classroom and can happen 24/7

Forms of cyberbullying

- **Harassment:** Repeatedly sending ofensive, rude, or threatening messages to a person online.
- **Cyberstalking:** Following someone online and sending frequent, intimidating messages.
- **Outing/Doxing:** Sharing someone's private or sensitive information (such as photos, messages, or personal details) without their consent.
- **Exclusion:** Deliberately excluding someone from online group chats, social media groups, or gaming communities.
- **Impersonation:** Pretending to be someone else online in order to hurt or embarrass them.
- **Trolling:** Deliberately posting provocative or inflammatory comments to incite arguments or upset someone.
- **Spreading rumours:** Sharing false information or lies about someone to damage their reputation.
- **Sexting and revenge pom:** Sharing sexually explicit images or videos of someone without their consent.

Perpetrators of cyberbullying

- **Peers:** Fellow learners may engage in cyberbullying to assert dominance or for personal reasons like jealousy or rivalry.

- **Strangers:** Some learners may be bullied by people they do not know through online platforms.

- **Anonymous users:** The anonymity provided by the Internet allows some individuals to hide their identities while bullying others.

- **Online groups:** Groups of learners or strangers may gang up on a target, magnifying the impact of the bullying.

Victims of cyberbullying

- **Any learner:** Cyberbullying can happen to anyone regardless of age, gender, or social status.

- **Socially isolated learners:** Those who are marginalized or lack strong social networks may be more vulnerable.

- **Learners with disabilities:** Those with physical, mental, or learning disabilities may face targeted bullying.

- **High-achieving learners:** Sometimes learners who excel academically or in extracurricular activities are targeted due to jealousy.

What peers and bystanders can do to prevent bullying

Peers and bystanders play a critical role in either reinforcing or stopping bullying. Empowering them to intervene can significantly reduce the incidence of bullying in schools.

- **Speak up:** Bystanders who witness bullying should be encouraged to report it to a trusted adult. Silence can be interpreted as approval, so speaking up is vital in stopping the behaviour.

- **Support the victim:** Ofering friendship and emotional support to victims can help them feel less isolated and more empowered to report bullying.

- **Don't participate:** Learners should be taught not to encourage or engage in bullying behaviour, even passively, by laughing or standing by without acting.

- **Be an ally:** By forming alliances and supporting peers who are being bullied, learners can help create a culture of inclusion and respect.

What teachers can do to prevent bullying

- **Create a safe environment:** Establish clear rules and policies that define and prohibit bullying. Ensure that all learners know the consequences of bullying.
- **Promote inclusivity:** Encourage learners to include others in activities and recognize diversity as a strength.
- **Supervise and intervene:** Actively supervise areas where bullying is likely to occur, such as playgrounds and hallways. Intervene immediately if bullying is observed.
- **Educate learners:** Incorporate lessons about bullying, empathy, and respectful behaviour into the curriculum. Teach learners about the impact of bullying and the importance of standing up against it.
- **Support victims:** Offer counselling and support to learners who have been bullied and work with them to develop coping strategies.
- **Teachers can assign older learners as mentors or buddies** for younger ones to help reduce violence on the way to school: Older learners can act as protectors and mediators, fostering a sense of safety and responsibility.
- **Raise awareness:** Educate learners about the dangers of bullying and the importance of taking responsibility.
- **Establish clear rules:** Implement strict anti-bullying rules and ensure that learners know the consequences of their actions.
- **Monitor technology use:** Use classroom technology wisely, ensuring that learners use it for educational purposes and not to harm others.
- **Encourage open communication:** Let learners know they can report bullying without fear of judgment or punishment.
- **Collaborate with parents:** Work with parents to monitor online behaviour and intervene early if signs of cyberbullying arise.

Chapter four: Sexual and gender-based violence

Sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) in schools is a critical issue that affects the safety, well-being and educational opportunities of learners.
It includes any harmful act directed at an individual based on their gender, often involving sexual exploitation, coercion, or abuse. SGBV can happen in schools, hostels, or even during interactions with peers or staff.

Forms of sexual and gender-based violence

- **Sexual harassment:** Unwanted advances, inappropriate comments, or gestures of a sexual nature.

- **Sexual exploitation:** Coercing learners into sexual activity in exchange for grades, favours, or resources.

- **Rape:** Forced, non-consensual sexual intercourse.

- **Intimidation orThreats:** Using fear to pressure someone into sexual activity.

- **Sexual bullying:** Verbal or physical behaviour targeting an individual's sexuality or gender identity.

- **Unwanted touching or assault:** Any physical contact of a sexual nature without consent.

- **Online child exploitation and abuse:** Online child sexual exploitation and abuse (OCSEA) refers to the manipulation or coercion of children into engaging in sexual activities, often involving the creation and distribution of explicit images or videos online.

Online child sexual exploitation and abuse

Online child sexual exploitation and abuse (OCSEA) refers to the manipulation or coercion of children into engaging in sexual activities, often involving the creation and distribution of explicit images or videos online.

Forms of online child sexual exploitation and abuse include:

Grooming

- Grooming is the process by which an adult builds trust with a child to sexually exploit them. Grooming occurs over social media, messaging apps, or gaming platforms.
- Perpetrators may shower children with attention, gifts or compliments, gaining their trust before introducing sexual content or behaviour.

Child Sexual Abuse Material (CSAM)

- The creation, sharing, or possession of sexually explicit images or videos involving minors.
- Often shared on dark web platforms or through encrypted apps, CSAM is a serious criminal ofence and a growing issue due to the accessibility of digital tools.

Sextortion

- The practice of threatening to share explicit images or videos of a child unless they comply with further demands, which may include producing more explicit content or engaging in sexual activity.
- Victims often feel trapped, ashamed and powerless, fearing the exposure of their private images to family, friends or the public.

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Perpetrators of sexual and gender-based violence

- **Peers:** Fellow learners may engage in sexual harassment or violence, often normalized by school culture.
- **Teachers and staf:** I n some cases, authority figures exploit their position of power.
- **Community members:** People outside the school environment may also be perpetrators, especially in unsafe commuting routes.
- **Online abusers:** Cyber harassment or sextortion via social media or other online platforms.

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Some common signs to identify victims of sexual and gender-based violence

- Sudden withdrawal or isolation from friends or school activities.
- Poor academic performance or a sudden drop in grades.
- Visible injuries or physical signs of assault.
- Emotional distress, such as depression, anxiety, or fear.
- Unexplained absences from school.
- Displaying fear or discomfort around certain individuals or groups.
- Refusing to go to the bathroom alone or at all can signal fear of violence or harassment. This behaviour often stems from traumatic experiences or anxiety about being alone in vulnerable situations.
- Learners who have experienced SGBV may alter their daily routines to avoid situations where they feel unsafe, such as avoiding certain hallways or places where they previously felt secure.

Victims of sexual and gender-based violence

- Both girls and boys can be victims, though girls are disproportionately affected.
- Vulnerable learners, including those from marginalized groups, the disabled, or those lacking strong social networks, may be at higher risk.

Teachers' role in preventing sexual and gender-based violence

- **Create awareness:** Educate learners on consent, respect, and gender equality.
- **Establish a safe space:** Ensure learners feel comfortable reporting violence cases.
- **Provide support:** Ofer emotional and psychological support to victims.
- **Be a role model:** Teachers should demonstrate respectful relationships and communication.
- **Understand reporting obligations:** Teachers should be fully aware of their legal responsibility as mandated reporters. This means they are required to report any suspected or confirmed cases of SGBV to the appropriate authorities, such as child protection services or law enforcement as soon as they become aware of it.
- **Recognize signs of SGBV:** Teachers must be vigilant in identifying potential signs of SGBV, such as unexplained injuries, behavioural changes, withdrawal, or avoidance of specific activities or people. Being trained to detect these signs is crucial in protecting children.
- **Follow school protocol:** Teachers should follow the school's specific reporting procedures. This often involves:
  - Reporting concerns directly to the designated safeguarding lead or headteacher.
  - Documenting all observed behaviours and suspicions carefully and confidentially.
  - Ensuring the report is made immediately to avoid any delay in intervention.
  - Confidentiality: When reporting SGBV, teachers should respect the child's privacy by limiting the sharing of sensitive information to only those directly involved in addressing the case. Maintaining confidentiality is key to protecting the child and their family from further harm.

- **Support the child emotionally:** While reporting, teachers should ofer emotional support to the child by:
  - Listening without judgement.
  - Reassuring the child that they are not to blame.
  - Explaining the next steps in a way the child can understand, ensuring they feel safe and supported.
- **Connect with external support services:** Teachers should know about available support services, such as:
  - Counsellors or school psychologists who can ofer immediate emotional support.
  - Child protection services that can intervene and provide long-term care.
  - Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) or community groups that specialize in SGBV cases, ofering legal, medical or psychological help.
  - Teachers can facilitate referrals to these services by working with the school's safeguarding team to connect the child to appropriate care.
- **Collaborate with parents/caregivers:** Teachers should work with the child's caregivers to ensure the child receives holistic support. This may involve holding meetings, providing resources, or guiding the family towards counselling or legal help.

Chapter five: How to prevent school-based violence

Creating a safe and supportive classroom environment is the role of all stakeholders which include parents, school administrators and the wider community. Effective collaboration between stakeholders is crucial in preventing school-based violence.

Tips to prevent school-based violence (teachers)

- **Engage parents in open communication:** Teachers should establish open lines of communication with parents to share concerns, discuss the child's behaviour, and provide strategies for preventing violence at home and in school. This can be done through: Parent-teacher meetings, school open days:

- **Building a support network for children:** Teachers should work with parents to identify and address early signs of aggression or emotional distress in children. To foster a supportive environment, the teachers can make use of parent counselling services, where teachers can refer parents to school counsellors if they need help in managing behavioural issues at home.

- **Ofering resources to parents:** Providing parents with literature or materials on non-violent conflict resolution and positive discipline strategies.

- **Modelling non-violence:** Teachers can share their classroom management techniques, demonstrating how non-violent methods can be efective for discipline and conflict resolution.

Tips to prevent school-based violence (parents)

Parents are often the first line of defense against school-based violence, as children's attitudes and behaviours are largely shaped by their home environment. Parents can foster positive behaviour and equip their children with the tools to navigate conflict and violence in healthy ways, some of which are listed below.

- **Parents as role models:** Children learn by example, and when parents demonstrate non-violent ways of resolving conflicts, children are more likely to adopt these behaviours.

- **Positive communication:** Parents should encourage open communication with their children, where feelings and conflicts are discussed without resorting to violence or aggression.

- **Conflict resolution skills:** Parents can teach children how to manage disagreements without physical or verbal aggression. Role-playing diferent scenarios can help children practice these skills

- **Emotional regulation:** Helping children identify and manage their emotions, particularly anger and frustration, reduces the likelihood that they will turn to violence in situations of conflict.

- **Household rules against violence:** Clear, firm rules against using violence should be established and enforced in the household. Consequences for aggressive behaviour should be consistent while rewarding positive, non-violent behaviour reinforces the message.

- **Supervision and monitoring:** Parents should monitor their children's activities, friendships, and media consumption. Knowing their child's environment and peers helps parents spot warning signs of involvement in violence early.

- **Encouraging empathy and inclusivity:** Parents should foster an environment of acceptance at home, where diferences in culture, gender or ability are celebrated, not ridiculed. This can be extended by encouraging friendships with children of diferent backgrounds, which promotes inclusivity and tolerance.

- **Engagement with school programmes:** Parents should participate in school-based programmes designed to prevent violence, such as workshops, parent-teacher meetings, and parent training on positive discipline.

- **Efective communication with school staf:** Maintaining open lines of communication with teachers and school authorities ensures that parents are informed of any issues their child may be facing and can work collaboratively with the school to address them.

Tips to prevent school-based violence (School-based management Committees)

- The school-based management committees (SBMCs) can collaborate with community vigilante/local law enforcement to increase patrols around school zones during peak hours. Law enforcement presence serves as a deterrent to violence and provides an immediate response in case of emergencies.

- SBMCs can collaborate with communities to establish anti-bullying committees that focus on creating a safe and inclusive environment for learners within the school community.

- SBMCs can collaborate with traditional and religious leaders in spreading awareness about the importance of creating a violence-free environment for children. These leaders hold influence and can help shift cultural norms towards more peaceful behaviour.

Tips to prevent school-based violence (school authorities)

School authorities, including administrators, head teachers and support staf, are the most direct and influential stakeholders in preventing violence within school premises. Their role is to create an environment where learners feel safe, respected and supported, both emotionally and physically. This includes:

- **Implementing clear anti-violence policies:** Schools must adopt and enforce clear policies that define violent behaviours and outline the consequences. This should include a zero-tolerance approach towards bullying, physical altercations, and any form of harassment.

- **Creating a positive school climate:** Schools should focus on creating a positive, inclusive climate where diversity is respected, and learners feel a sense of belonging. Respect should be emphasized as a core school value, reinforced through classroom discussions, school-wide campaigns and staf training.

- **Early identification and intervention:** School staf should be trained to recognize early warning signs of violent behaviour, such as aggressive attitudes, social isolation, or a history of conflict with peers. Early intervention through counselling or social support can prevent these learners from engaging in violence. School staf can also identify learners at risk of becoming victims by carrying out regular check-in meetings with such students and by observation, so it's easier to catch them early if they do experience violence.

- **Promoting conflict resolution skills:** Schools can conduct conflict resolution training for teachers thereby transferring such knowledge to the students. Teaching learners how to solve disputes non-violently and equipping them with communication skills can prevent situations from escalating into violence.

- **Engaging parents and families**: Regular communication with parents: School authorities should maintain regular communication with parents about their child's behaviour, academic progress, and any concerns regarding potential violence. Involving parents in behaviour management plans helps reinforce positive behaviour at home and school.

- **Monitoring and security measures:** Where it is possible, schools can install cameras in high-tra c areas of the school. This can deter violence and provide evidence in the case of incidents. However, this should be balanced with respect for learner privacy.

- **Designing safe school spaces:** Creating safe physical environments by ensuring proper lighting, eliminating secluded areas, and having designated staf present in areas where violence is more likely to occur (such as playgrounds or corridors) can reduce opportunities for violence.

Chapter six: Reporting and referral mechanisms

Reporting and referral mechanisms are essential in addressing school-based violence. They help to ensure that victims of violence receive timely assistance and support, and they contribute to the prevention of further abuse.

Violence reporting

Schools should have a clear protocol for reporting incidents of violence by students. Teachers and staf should document the incident and report it to the appropriate school authorities (such as the school principal, school counsellor, or designated safeguarding o cer). Parents should report issues of violence through the Parents Teachers Association and directly to the school authorities.

For serious cases involving sexual, physical, or severe psychological violence, mandatory reporting to external authorities (such as child protection services or law enforcement) may be required.

Referral Process

As soon as violence is reported, the next step is referral to specialized services for further support. This can include:

- **Counselling services:** For emotional and psychological support.
- **Medical services:** For cases involving physical harm or sexual violence.
- **Social services:** To provide protection and legal support, especially in cases involving abuse at home.
- **Law enforcement:** In situations where criminal behaviour is involved, such as assault or sexual violence.

Follow-up services
Follow-up care is crucial to ensure the long-term well-being of the victim. This can include continued counselling, monitoring academic performance, and regular check-ins to ensure the violence has stopped and the learner feels safe.

Confidentiality
Throughout the reporting and referral process, confidentiality is essential. Details of the incident should only be shared with those directly involved in the referral process, and victims should feel confident that their privacy will be respected.

The teacher's role as mandated reporter of violence

Teachers serve as mandated reporters, playing a critical role in safeguarding children from violence, including physical, emotional, and sexual abuse.

Key responsibilities include:

1. **Recognize signs of violence:** Identify indicators such as unexplained injuries, behavioural changes and reluctance to attend school.

2. **Document observations:** Keep detailed records of any incidents, including dates, descriptions, and direct quotes from the child.

3. **Report to designated personnel:** Notify the school's designated safeguarding o cer or counsellor, following established reporting procedures.

4. **Referral to support services:** Ensure learners have access to counselling and medical care, and collaborate with local organizations for additional support.

5. **Maintain confidentiality:** Protect the child's privacy by sharing information only with relevant personnel involved in the response process.

Please refer to the National Safeguarding Referral Pathway below;

National Safeguarding Referral Pathway
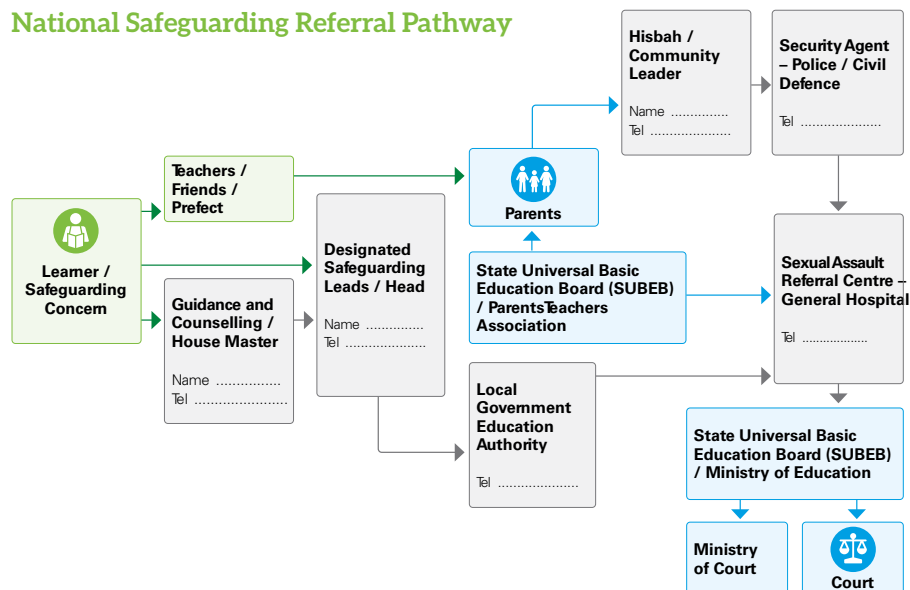
Recommended code of conduct for teachers

Professional behaviour:

- Teachers must act with integrity, fairness and impartiality. They should treat all learners with respect and dignity, without favouritism or discrimination.

- Teachers must refrain from any behaviour that could be construed as harassment, abuse, or exploitation of learners, whether physical, verbal or emotional.

Responsibility for learners' safety:

- Teachers are responsible for ensuring the safety and well-being of learners in their care. This includes reporting any signs of abuse or violence promptly and appropriately, according to the school's policies.

Confidentiality:

- Teachers must respect the confidentiality of learners who report violence, sharing information only with those directly involved in the referral process. Breaching confidentiality can deter future reporting and undermine trust.

Role model:

- Teachers should serve as role models for learners by demonstrating respectful, non-violent behaviour and promoting a culture of inclusivity and tolerance in the classroom.

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