



BUILDING & USING MULTIDISCIPLINARY TEAMS FOR AISA SCHOOLS

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ABOUT AISA

The Association of International Schools in Africa (AISA), established in 1969, is a non-profit education association supporting the professional learning and school improvement strategies of international schools on the continent of Africa. Based in Nairobi, Kenya, AISA offers a professional learning programme specifically designed to meet the unique needs of our diverse member school community. AISA also offers a number of supplementary programmes, scholarships and facilitates collaboration among member schools to advance school effectiveness and improve student learning.

1 Introduction

International schools need to understand and adhere to laws and regulations of the host country in developing and implementing child protection procedures. Developing formal and informal working relationships at different levels with host country authorities are important steps that schools may have to take to implement an effective child protection program.

International schools are not islands. An optimal safe environment requires the cooperation, collaboration and support of the entire community, including the local governmental and non-governmental agencies in place to protect children and advocate for their needs. Furthermore, it may be obligatory and necessary to work with local statutory agencies to deal with child protection issues and problems. It will be important for international school administrators to be aware of and be in contact with, the agencies and institutions in their host country/city that have roles and responsibilities regarding children's issues. The following are some of the government and nongovernmental bodies that your school should contact and collaborate with in terms of developing and implementing school-based child protection programs.

- * The police
- * Hospitals
- * The courts and lawyers
- * The Children's Department(s), Embassies and other Government agencies
- * Nongovernmental agencies (UNICEF, ISPCAN, etc.)

Forming an MDT around your school can help remove the isolation, insularity and fear of the issue that often exists in our expatriate communities. Forming an MDT before you begin the process of designing your internal child protection policy and practices could guide you to:

1. Know the law and what it means for your community (such as age of responsibility, laws that conflict with laws in your country that might include freedom of speech, freedom of association or sexuality).
2. Know how to report when the law is broken (some common concerns include language, culture, economic issues (condition of government services vs home of parent offender), skills, process
3. Know how to seek assistance from the law for suspected cases of child abuse and neglect (CAN) (have access to an English speaking third-party trained forensic investigator)
4. Know how each of the embassies of your foreign students could help or respond in cases of abuse or suspected abuse (get resources from these countries in case you need to report serious cases to the home-of-record, understand the limitations of diplomatic immunity)
5. Know how to seek assistance from child welfare authority (custody of child when abuse in the home, foster-care from expat community, authority to mandate counselling, oversight of the case (supporting and watching the offender))

6. Know what services are available for child victims of CAN and domestic violence (DV) (often other expat resources, yet must be willing to work with authority for relevant cases, know where are the boundaries between what your school counselor can and should do and what needs to be referred out)
7. Know medical sources for medico-legal concerns (certain hospitals could have trained medical forensic doctors or nurses)

The multidisciplinary team (MDT) is an advisory/consultative team that provides advice by meeting on a regularly scheduled basis or as needed. The multidisciplinary team will not provide direct services or face-to-face contact with families. They will offer support and advice to professionals who refer cases to them. The advisory team will note their advisory status in their appointing documents and descriptive literature. The multidisciplinary team is established to deal only with the specific issue of child abuse reported within affiliated schools and must be authorized by the Head of School or Board to function in this capacity for the school community.

For schools in countries with strong child protection systems in place, the MDT helps local authority understand the unique characteristics of our expatriate community. For schools with weak or no child protection systems in place, the MDT can be a conduit to authority that does exist or be an alternative to legal or social authority to mandate help for children, parents and alleged offenders in difficult cases. The MDT aims to:

- * Expand the school's resources in areas the school lacks resources (such as social workers, police officers, forensic interviewers)
- * Engage qualified trained professionals in your host country who can assist you when you have a complicated case
- * Help the school to consider what steps to take in a variety of cases
- * Protect a child while they are in school and work with parents to help keep the child safe outside of school

SCENARIOS

Domestic violence. Foreign father and mother have physical fights. Children are traumatized. School insists that parents have counselling but this stops after 3 times. Children's traumatized behaviour returns. Now what?

Attempted suicide. School suspects sexual abuse by father. Now what?

Physical Abuse. A diplomatic mother whips her daughter and rubs chili powder into the wounds. The city's Social Services Department and the police were notified and the school called a meeting with them. Because the family had diplomatic passports, the parents were out of reach of the law. Now what?

2 Research Based Frameworks

For more information, see:

http://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/cb/pii_ttap_framework.pdf

<https://www.dcp.wa.gov.au/Resources/Documents/Policies%20and%20Frameworks/SignsOfSafetyFramework2011.pdf>

Using Save the Children framework, a national child protection system consists of:

- * laws and policies that protect children from abuse, neglect, exploitation, and violence and respond in the best interests of the child when violations occur,
- * a central government coordination mechanism for child protection, which brings together central government departments, different provinces, central and local levels of government and civil society,
- * effective regulation and monitoring at all levels, for example in childcare institutions and schools,
- * a committed workforce with relevant competencies and mandates,
- * mechanisms that bring perpetrators to justice.

In addition, a functioning child protection system should be informed by children's views and experiences and strengthens families in the care and protection of their children. It connects child and family support mechanisms in the community with child-friendly services at all levels. These are regulated by quality standards and delivered by the government or accredited social agencies.

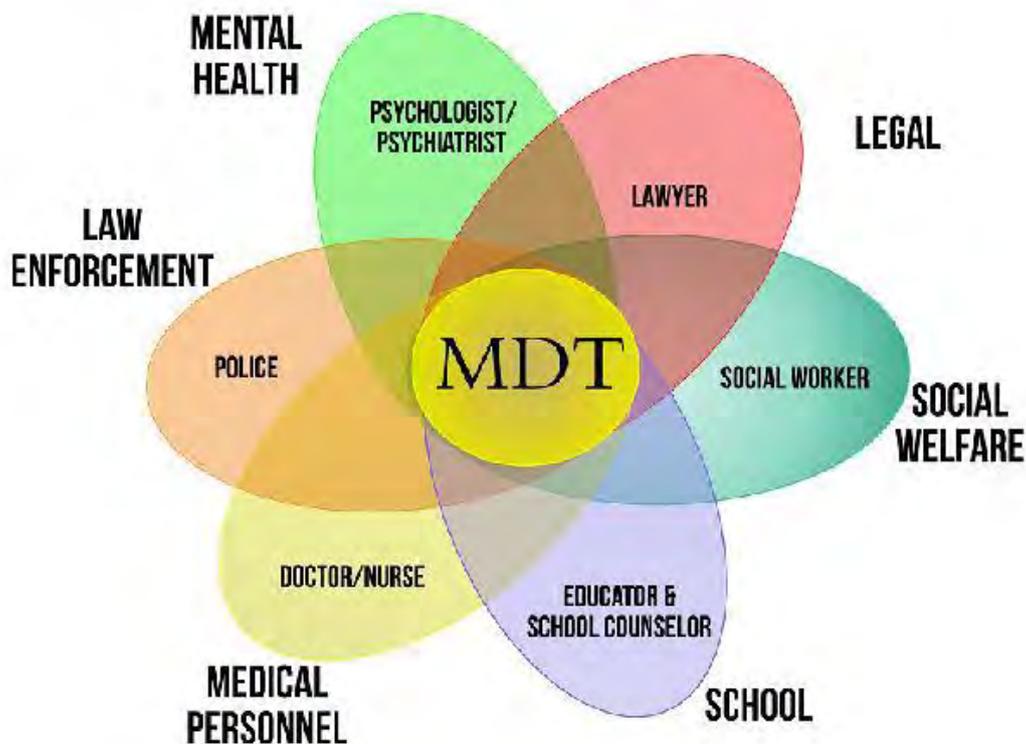
3 Members of an MDT

A detailed list of multidisciplinary team members and their roles can be found in the AISA Child Protection Handbook in Section 4.

Generally, a MDT consists of a medical representative, social worker / community counsellor representative, psychiatrist or psychologist, law enforcement representative, attorney, educator, school counsellor, and the school point person/facilitator. Team members must understand exactly what expertise they are expected to bring to the team process. They also need to understand the professional roles of other team members.

The facilitator, from your school, is the one to maintain relationships with individual members, and will schedule meetings, provide access to parking, food, snacks, and other possible assistance such as taxi fares for certain members.

All members of the MDT have to agree to a confidentiality statement and code of conduct that makes explicit what information will be shared regarding outcomes and actions.



4 Guidelines for Establishing an MDT

It is best to establish relationships in advance and in a proactive manner rather than have a first interaction with a host country agency occur during a time of crisis or need. School administrators and counsellors are well served to visit host country agencies and ministries as well as to host at your school courtesy “get acquainted” meetings with various host country resource personnel. Consider the MDT before even developing school policy so that they can advise in the creation of the school policy.

1. *Begin by finding someone from your school community to take the lead to establish the MDT.* This person is the facilitator of the meetings and maintains relationships. It is suggested that this “point person” ideally would be a host country national (i.e. parent, other school personnel), and/or partner with a counsellor or administrator. This would ensure stability and continuity in the transient nature of International Schools. The challenge when finding a facilitator is that this networking could take a great deal of time, which most school personnel don’t have outside of their classroom or regular tasks.
2. *To find possible MDT members, begin with your community.* Find people with appropriate skills or contacts to other professionals from the list above. Make as long a list as possible.
3. *Meet with each of the candidates personally to assess their willingness and suitability:*
 - a. do they have the time for periodic meetings, especially in cases of the unlikely emergency when the team must come together immediately;

- b. do they have the appropriate professional skills and experience (do lawyers know local child protection laws; do social workers know local child protection policies and practices; do doctors know child abuse forensic issues; do counsellors have experience and expertise in child abuse and family counselling);
 - c. do they work well with groups to avoid hierarchy of professions; d) do they have an objective relationship with the schools and/or child and family.
4. *Set up an initial meeting.* The agenda for the initial meeting would include introductions, members sharing their skills and knowledge in child protection, how the MDT would operate, note-taking, confidentiality, venues for meetings, communication, and commitment for time and meetings. A mock-case could be used for discussion. Additionally, this meeting will serve as an orientation on school policies as per the core competencies below:
- * **SHARED RESPONSIBILITY** - agree to collective and shared responsibility of the community.
 - * **CHILD PROTECTION TEAM** - will know the school's child protection team to include their roles and responsibilities;
 - * **POLICIES, PROCEDURES AND REPORTING** - will understand the school's child protection policies and procedures and each member's requirement for reporting
 - * **DEFINITIONS AND SIGNS** - share the school's definitions and signs of child abuse and neglect;
 - * **NATURE OF STUDENT COMMUNITY** - will have an understanding of the nature of local and expatriate children and their specific areas *of vulnerability*;
 - * **EDUCATION** - *share child protection education program at the school.*

5 Activating an MDT Meeting

The school-based Child Protection Team, together with the counsellor, will determine if a meeting needs to be called.

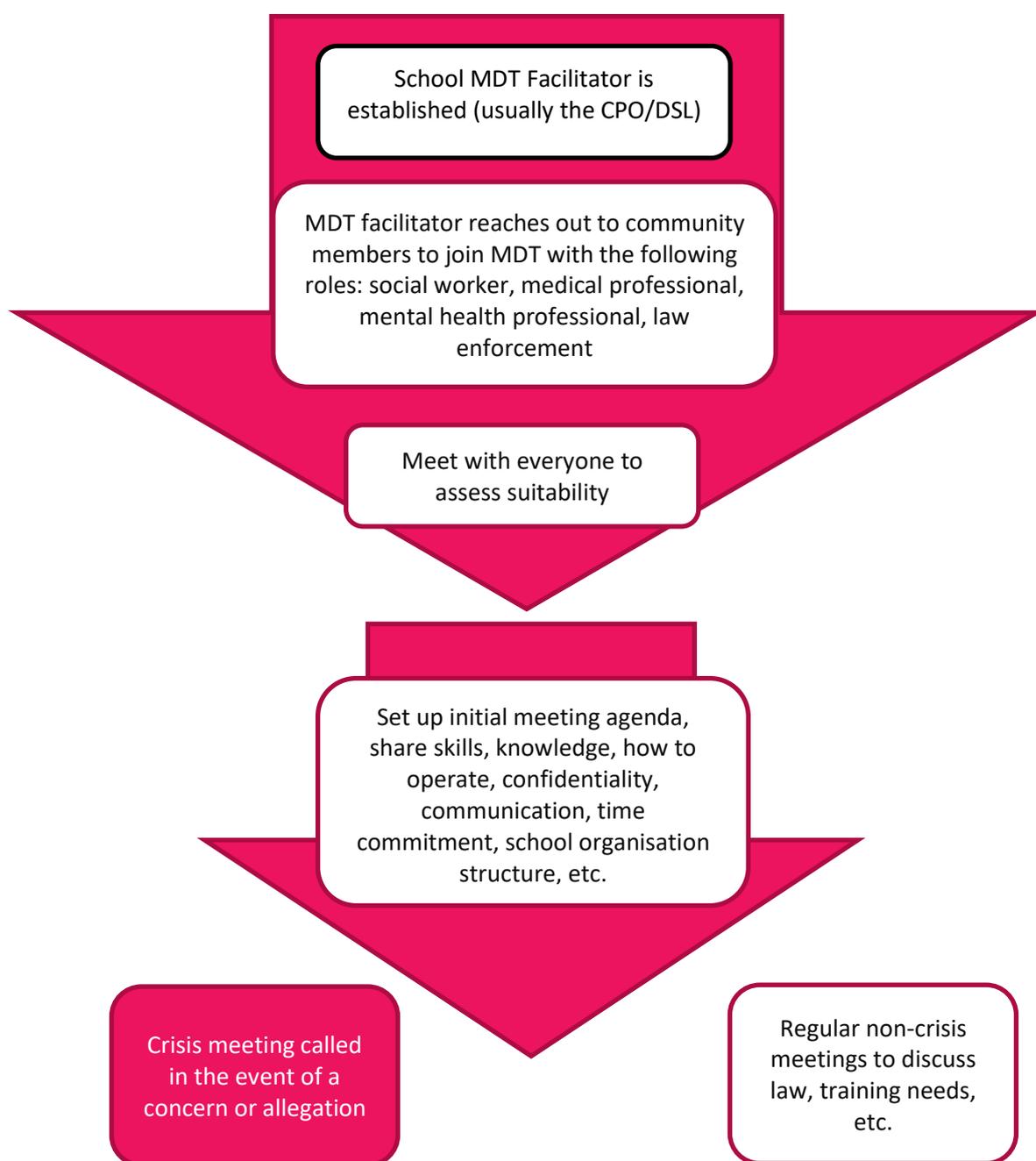
In our schools there are generally three types of categories of allegations. Only the serious cases, Category C, go to the MDT.

Category A –	Category B –	Category C -
Most cases will be handled by school counsellors:	Some cases will be referred to outside resources:	Cases reported for investigation and outside resources:
* Student relationships with peers	* Mental health issues such as depression, psychosis, dissociation, suicide ideation	* Severe and ongoing physical, emotional and sexual abuse or neglect
* Parenting skills related to disciplining children at home		
* Student-parent relationships		
* Mental health issues such as depression, low self-esteem, grieving		

When a case needs consultation, the school facilitator/point person will convene the team, inviting relevant members of the MDT to attend and discuss.

During the team meeting, the school will present their case based on their case study format. The case manager will be the person presenting the case (usually the school counsellor), who will document all recommendations and report back to the MDT for follow-up when needed. It is best to keep the meeting no longer than 90 minutes and provide snacks.

5.1 Establishing a Multi-Disciplinary Team:



After the MDT gives advice:

- * Schools can expect continued conversations between agencies and MDT members regarding the outcomes of decisions and action taken.
- * School-based Child Protection Teams can decide on a case-by-case basis to follow the recommendation of the MDT. However, in cases of law, schools must follow what the law says.

Other considerations:

Many schools have strong connections to Embassies:

- * understand the issue of diplomatic immunity, its limitations and boundaries
- * know what services they can provide and to whom, how to report to them, how to access help, how to get feedback about action, could they be a part of the MDT
- * establish the point person role at the embassy, such as the embassy doctor or regional security officer to maintain ongoing relationship

Sometimes the child may do better when taken out of the home but local institutions in some countries are not good places for our students. The MDT could help guide your discussion, in particular to partner with the family to make agreements about where the child could stay. In these cases it is best for the MDT to oversee the placement. However, sometimes the school has to let it go and turn the case over to local authority, dictated by the laws under which we are obligated to work.

Connecting with local authorities and reporting to law is a way to support parents to make behaviour change. Resistance, lack of empathy, cognitive distortions, levels of stress, and rationalization will block behaviour change counselling, thus maintaining and continuing their behaviour through increasing threats and other forms of manipulation. For the children of these parents, outside authority is needed to intervene through some form of law enforcement venue. It is important to remember that parents need to feel that they are befriended and supported from us in schools, rather than feeling punished. That is our role.

If you are still resisting basing your child protection policy and practices on local law and setting up a multidisciplinary team, here are the limitations if you do NOT use legal sources:

- * Cannot report to other schools
- * Cannot report to other countries
- * Cannot report to licensing boards
- * Cannot report to ISS
- * Cannot protect other students

WHO ARE THE RESOURCES IN MY SCHOOL'S COMMUNITY TO BUILD A MULTIDISCIPLINARY TEAM?

LEGAL

LAW ENFORCEMENT

SOCIAL WORK

MEDICAL

PSYCHOLOGIST/COUNSELOR

EDUCATOR

EMBASSY