

## CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

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*I believe the children are our future  
Teach them well and let them lead the way  
Show them all the beauty they possess inside  
Give them a sense of pride, to make it easier  
Let the children's laughter, remind us how we used to be*

I first heard the song in a Filipino movie I watched starred by Vilma Santos and Joel Torre. I did not understand completely the meaning of it. But I would like to believe that the Whitney Houston song added more cinematic appeal to the controversial Carlo J. Caparas' movie. Now that I am a teacher, the song takes on an utterly new meaning.

The learners are the utmost priority in every educational institution. The educational programs and reforms in the Philippines favored the learners – their learning, transformation, and whole-being. So, the highest mandate of the land ensures to protect the right of children to assistance, including proper care and nutrition, and special protection from all forms of neglect, abuse, cruelty, exploitation, and other conditions prejudicial to their development.

In connection, the Department of Education (DepEd) issued 2012 the Policy and Guidelines on Protecting Children in School from Abuse, Violence, Exploitation, Discrimination, Bullying, and Other Forms of Abuse titled, "DepEd Child Protection Policy." The policy serves as a guide on what constitutes child abuse and how children can be protected from violence and exploitation. Thus, abuse within the school is avoided in cooperation with school officials.

The Presidential Decree 603 or "Youth and Children Code", Republic Act 7610 or Special Protection Against Child Abuse, Republic Act 10627 or Anti-Bullying Act of 2013, Republic Act 9344, as amended or Juvenile Justice and Welfare Act, Republic Act 10630 RIRR of RA 9344 or the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), serve as legal bases which guarantee the protection of children from all forms of violence, injury or abuse.

In an online article published in Rappler last February 25, 2020, a teacher in Bataan was arrested after a 10-year-old female student complained he had sexually molested her on school grounds. The suspect allegedly kissed the student and touched her private parts inside one of the school's comfort rooms. The suspect violated Republic Act 7610 as explained by Hermosa Police Station.

Meanwhile, a pregnant teacher from Isabela faced DepEd's investigation for screaming and physically hurting Grade 4 to 6 students. In an online post of Coconut Manila Newsletter, via Philippine Daily Inquirer and abs-cbn.com, the teacher will be punished dependent on the outcome of the investigation. She could be given anger management sessions or preventive suspension for 90 days. She could also be re-assigned to a non-teaching position.

While the government is firm in implementing sharp teeth to school personnel who will abuse children, teachers are crying out over students and parents who are normalizing students' misbehavior and violations by using the Child Protection Policy as a defense. Teachers are being hampered in taking appropriate disciplinary actions against the students' misdemeanor and delinquency in fear of violating the law. In return, it makes the students more disobedient and violent.

In the November 22, 2019 issue of the Manila Bulletin, DepEd investigated a case of a teacher humiliated on TV for 'child abuse. Lawyer and education advocate Atty. Joseph Noel Estrada appealed to the public to hear the teacher's side. He also offered to help Melita Limjuco, 55, who was featured on broadcaster Raffy Tulfo's television show after a student's relatives complained of alleged child abuse on her part. "I do not see any abuse done by the teacher," he said. "The disciplinary action imposed by the teacher is the necessary consequence of the child's misconduct," he added.

In school settings, the teachers are the superiors and the students are the inferiors, the former is the authority, and the latter, the subordinate. From any angle, the students are still the most vulnerable in every educational institution. The teachers, as second parents, have a wider understanding of the events and situations than the students. In implementing disciplinary actions against the students, it is necessary to consider their rights. Teachers can exercise "tough love" as long as it conforms to the school policies and does not violate any law.

For every organization to succeed and survive, every part of the structure must be considered; in this case – students, teachers, administrators, and the community. Keeping children safe is everyone's responsibility. Organizations and professionals who work with children are required to ensure that their policies and practices reflect this responsibility.

The Department of Education reiterates a zero-tolerance policy for any act of child abuse, exploitation, violence, discrimination, bullying, and other forms of abuse. This policy also demonstrates an organization's commitment to children and ensures public confidence in its safe practices.

Child protection is more than just a responsibility. It is a strong commitment we have towards our children. All children have equal rights to protection from abuse and exploitation.

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The children are our future. If you want a brighter future for the Philippines – invest in them, protect them.

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