



Guidelines for schools on establishing and operating a School Safety Committee

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Contents

Contents	2
Introduction	3
Purpose.....	3
Structure.....	3
Section 1: The role of the School Safety Committee	4
1. Membership.....	4
2. Key principles the SSC must follow	4
3. Roles and responsibilities	5
3.1 Responsibility 1: Reviewing, resolving or referring any cases of violence	6
3.2 Responsibility 2: Conduct a School Safety Self-Assessment	8
3.3 Responsibility 3: Develop and implement a School Safety Action Plan	12
Section 2: Key national policies and guidelines	14
1. Teachers' Code of Conduct.....	14
2. National Referral Protocol (2024)	16
Step 1. A report is made.....	16
Step 2. Referrals are made to ensure immediate needs are met.....	17
Section 3: SRGBV concepts	17
Section 4: Additional resources	19

Introduction

The Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education (MBSSE), with support from the Sierra Leone Secondary Education Improvement Programme II (SSEIP2), has developed these guidelines to help schools implement a School Safety Committee (SSC), as introduced in the Reducing Violence in Schools Guide (2016).

Purpose

This manual aims to guide all primary and secondary schools in Sierra Leone in the establishment and operationalisation of SSC.

Every primary and secondary school in Sierra Leone should have a SSC. These are responsible for preventing and responding to School-Related Gender-Based Violence (SRGBV) in school or on the way to school.

The audience for this manual is the members of the SSCs in Sierra Leonean schools.

Structure

This manual is divided in four sections:

- Section 1 describes the role of the School Safety Committee.
- Section 2 describes the key national policies and guidelines the SSCs need to know and implement in their schools.
- Section 3 is a summary of key concepts on SRGBV.
- Section 4 provides links to additional resources.

Section 1: The role of the School Safety Committee

1. Membership

- It is the responsibility of the school principal to create a School Safety Committee (SSC).
- SSC should be comprised of the principal, vice principal, female and male teacher mentors, guidance counsellor, and a inclusion champion if there is one in the school.
- The SSC should also include Board of Governors (BoG)/Community Teachers' Association (CTA) members and representants of the students.
- If possible, at least three SSC members should be female.

Figure 1. Members of the SSC



2. Key principles the SSC must follow

1. **Survivor centred:** All SSC responses should be underpinned by respect, compassion, and human dignity. They must prioritise the rights, needs, wishes, and choices of the survivor while upholding confidentiality.
2. **Confidentiality** is the right of a person to have their information treated with respect. It promotes safety, trust and empowerment. This includes making sure permission is obtained from the survivor before sharing any information, sharing only details that are relevant and ensuring that all the case information is stored securely.

3. **Informed consent** is the voluntary agreement of an individual who has the legal capacity to give consent. The survivor must have the capacity and maturity to know and understand the services being offered and be legally able to give consent.
4. **Right to dignity and self-determination:** SGBV is an assault on the dignity and rights of a person. All those who come into contact with survivors have a role to play in restoring dignity and self-determination. This means adopting a validating, non-blaming and non-judgmental approach, valuing the survivor and caring about their experience, history and future and allowing the survivor to make their own decisions.
5. **Right to safety:** Safety refers to both physical safety and security, as well as to a sense of psychological and emotional safety for people who are highly distressed.
6. **Non-discrimination:** All people have the right to the best possible assistance without unfair discrimination on the basis of gender, age, disability, race, colour, language, religious or political beliefs, sexual orientation or social class

3. Roles and responsibilities

School Safety Committee's roles and responsibilities can be divided into three main tasks.

Figure 2. Roles and responsibilities



3.1 Responsibility 1: Reviewing, resolving or referring any cases of violence

a) Reviewing

- The SSC is responsible for reviewing all cases of violence reported in the school. There should be different routes for reporting violence in school, including through teacher mentors or any trusted adult, a suggestion box, or a direct report made by school staff, a parent etc.

Figure 3. Routes for reporting any cases of violence, or any safeguarding concern in school

How to report violence



- The school safety committee must review **all reports** made through any of the above-mentioned channels.
- In principle, the SSC should meet **every week**. If there is a case that requires immediate attention, the School Safety Committee should immediately hold an emergency meeting.
- The SSC must **log all reports**. This means keeping a written record of any reports, how they were addressed and when, following the template below.
- The SSC must **keep confidentiality** on all reports and at all times.

Reports record template

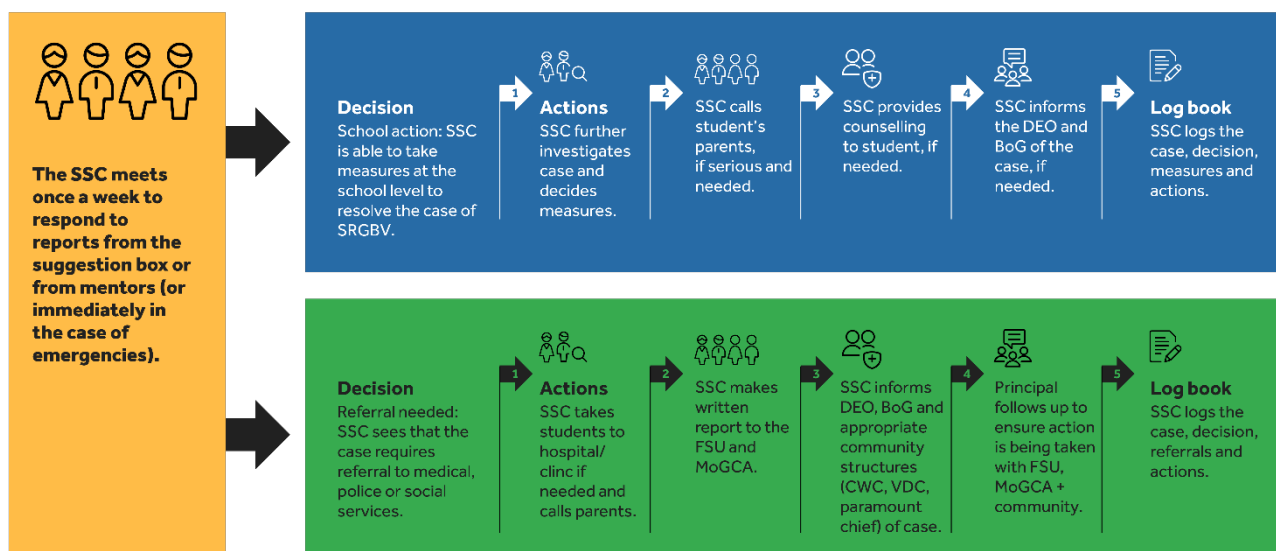
Date	Victim code (Admission number or register code)	Description of incident (Date and time of incident; age and sex of victim; location where the incident took place; exactly what the victim said about the incident, any witnesses, name of perpetrator)	Decision (School-level action or external referral)	Actions (Date of actions and who is responsible)	Resolution (Final conclusion, date, if there was punitive action and follow-up with the victim)

b) Resolution of cases

For each report, the SSC must decide if the issue may be resolved at the school level or whether it needs to be referred to external actors (the police, a health facility, the District education team etc).

Figure 4. Step by step process for reviewing reports, making decisions and taking actions

Review



The SSC needs to exercise its judgment to decide if the case is serious enough to require external referral, for the benefit of the survivor/victim. For example, any case of sexual violence would need to be, at a minimum, referred to the District Education Office (DEO), and very probably to the police and medical providers. If the case involves a school staff, it should also be reported to the Teaching Service Commission (TSC).

Cases involving psychological or physical violence, where the perpetrator is another student, possibly can be dealt with at school level, if the issue is not too serious. However, the police and/or health providers might need to be involved in some cases.

In general, all cases involving a school staff as perpetrator do need to be referred to TSC and DEO at the very least, as this is a major breach in the Teachers' Code of Conduct.

The following figure presents a summary of this section.

Figure 5. Summary of role and responsibilities of SSC



3.2 Responsibility 2: Conduct a School Safety Self-Assessment

School safety self-assessments should be conducted by the SSC on an annual basis with members of the BoG and Parent-Teacher Association (PTA)/CTA. This assessment includes a student-led mapping of safe and unsafe spaces and will also serve as the basis for an action plan to improve the school's safety.

The below questionnaire should be completed by the SSC and will inform the school's safety action plan (see next section).

Self-Assessment Questions

SCHOOL SAFETY SELF-ASSESSMENT				
School: _____ District: _____ Academic year: _____				
Area	Question	Yes	Partially	No
1. School environment, facilities and access routes	1.1 Have students contributed to a mapping of areas that make them feel safe and unsafe in school? (What can be done with the unsafe areas?)			
	1.2 Are the students' routes to and from school safe, particularly for students with disabilities? (If there are students who feel unsafe, what can be done with the community?)			
	1.3 Are all areas within the school compound visible?			
	1.4 Is the school fenced or has the school a perimeter wall?			
	1.5 Are bushes cleared around the school compound, toilets and recreational areas?			
	1.6 Are there separate, lockable toilets for boys/girls, male/female staff?			
	1.7 Are the toilets in close proximity to the school in an open and visible location?			
	1.8 Are the toilets safe and clean with adequate washing facilities?			
	1.9 Are the toilets female-friendly (e.g. space for changing and washing menstrual pads, with safe and hygienic disposal)?			
	1.10 Are there water points (e.g. well, pipe-borne water supply, etc.) within or very close to the school?			
	1.11 Is there regular checking and maintenance of school facilities (e.g. broken lights, windows, toilets, locks, etc.)?			
2. School safety awareness	2.1 Is the Zero-Tolerance rule against Violence shared and in a visible place to all teachers, students and community stakeholders?			
	2.2 Is section 2.2.3 of the Teacher Code of Conduct shared and in visible place to all teachers, students and community stakeholders?			
	2.3 Have all teachers signed a form that they have read and understood the Code of Conduct and agree to comply with it?			
	2.4 Are the two ways to report violence (mentor + suggestion box) shared and in visible place to all teachers, students and community stakeholders?			
	2.5 Do the heads of school monitor whether the Zero-Tolerance rule against violence is being upheld by teachers and students?			

SCHOOL SAFETY SELF-ASSESSMENT				
School: _____ District: _____ Academic year: _____				
Area	Question	Yes	Partially	No
	2.6 Does the BoG/CTA monitor compliance to the Zero-Tolerance Policy and Code of Conduct through regular check-ins with students and staff?			
	2.7 Have all teachers completed the Teacher Learning Circle on the school safety guide?			
	2.8 Have all students received information on the School Safety Guide through assemblies and Girls' and Boys' clubs?			
	2.9 Has the school leadership sensitised communities around the school safety issues (e.g. through VDC/CTA meetings)?			
3. School Safety Committee	3.1. Has a school safety committee been established and its members been introduced to the school and community?			
	3.2 Do the members of the school safety committee know their roles and responsibilities?			
	3.3 Has the school designated at least one male and female teacher (or female community member) to serve as school mentors for boys and girls?			
	3.4 Have the mentors been introduced to all teachers and students in school?			
	3.5 Does the school safety committee have three female representatives?			
	3.6 If new mentors or SSC members have been assigned, have they completed a Teacher Learning Circle on the School Safety Guide?			
4. Reporting and referral mechanisms	4.1 Has the school established a suggestion box for students to report incidents of SRGBV?			
	4.2 Is the suggestion box opened at least once per week by designated members of the school safety committee?			
	4.3 Is the suggestion box in a private place that is easily accessible to students? (i.e., NOT in front of the principal's or vice principal's office).			
	4.4 Are SRGBV cases being reported in the school (in-person or through the suggestion box)?			
	4.5 Do heads of schools, mentors and all teachers know and understand the official referral pathways for serious violence?			
	4.6 Has the head of school established a list of local Family Support Unit (FSU), child protection, health and law enforcement focal points?			
	4.7 Are the focal points' contact information posted in a visible place for teachers', students' and community members' use?			
5. Safety	5.1 Has the school put in place confidential processes for			

SCHOOL SAFETY SELF-ASSESSMENT				
School: _____ District: _____ Academic year: _____				
Area	Question	Yes	Partially	No
documentation and follow-up	documenting incidents of violence (i.e., a log book)?			
	5.2 Have reported cases been documented confidentially, ensuring the safety of the victim/witness?			
	5.3 Have the cases been followed-up until the closure of the cases?			

3.3 Responsibility 3: Develop and implement a School Safety Action Plan

Upon completing the school safety assessment each year, the teachers and the SSC/BoG/CTA should collectively decide on the five issues that should be improved during the academic year. These five issues form the basis for the school's safety action plan.

School Safety Action Plan

SCHOOL SAFETY ACTION PLAN			
School: _____ District: _____ Academic year: _____			
What are the five prioritised issues to improve from the self-assessment?			
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			
5			
Issue	Actions to be taken this year	Person(s) responsible	Deadline
1			
2			
3			

4			
5			

Name and signature of principal: _____

Name and signature of chairperson BoG: _____

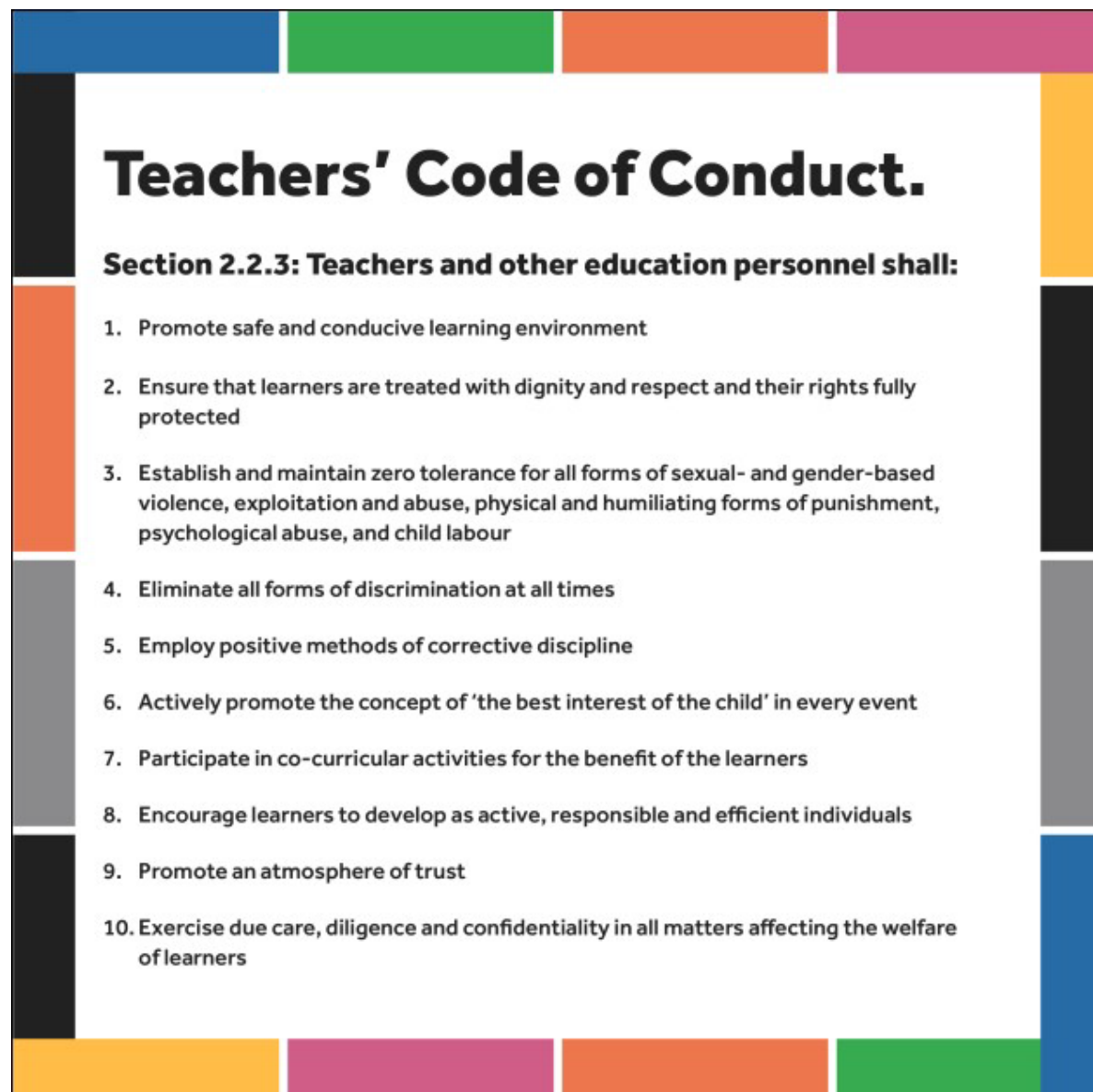
Name and signature of chairperson CTA: _____

Date: _____

Section 2: Key national policies and guidelines

1. Teachers' Code of Conduct

The Teachers' Code of Conduct sets out the expectations of professional standards to be met by teachers in and out of learning environments. It is a legal document with clear roles and responsibilities:

A graphic titled 'Teachers' Code of Conduct.' featuring a list of 10 points. The graphic is framed by a thick border composed of various colored rectangular blocks in shades of blue, green, orange, pink, yellow, and grey. The text is centered within the white space of the graphic.

Teachers' Code of Conduct.

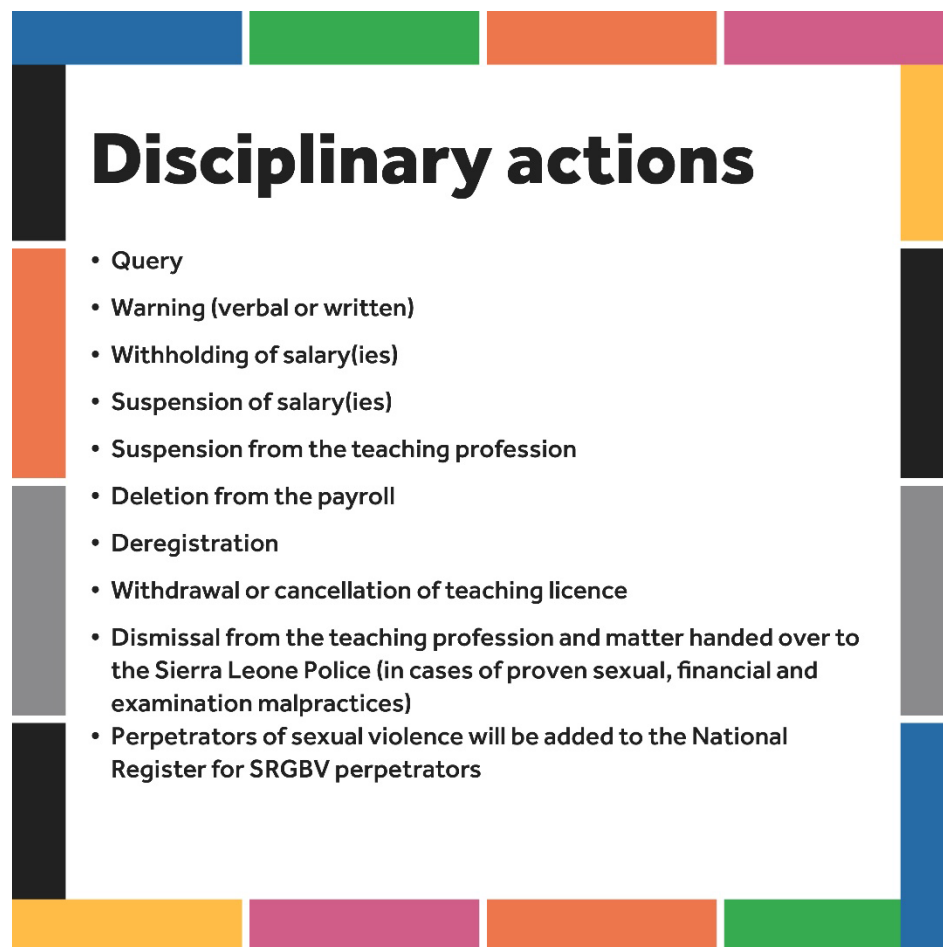
Section 2.2.3: Teachers and other education personnel shall:

1. Promote safe and conducive learning environment
2. Ensure that learners are treated with dignity and respect and their rights fully protected
3. Establish and maintain zero tolerance for all forms of sexual- and gender-based violence, exploitation and abuse, physical and humiliating forms of punishment, psychological abuse, and child labour
4. Eliminate all forms of discrimination at all times
5. Employ positive methods of corrective discipline
6. Actively promote the concept of 'the best interest of the child' in every event
7. Participate in co-curricular activities for the benefit of the learners
8. Encourage learners to develop as active, responsible and efficient individuals
9. Promote an atmosphere of trust
10. Exercise due care, diligence and confidentiality in all matters affecting the welfare of learners

Every teacher and education personnel needs to observe the Code.

Major violations of the Code of Conduct include any type of sexual harassment or sexual violence, but also severe corporal punishment and financial malpractices.

Breach of the Code of Conduct, especially proven sexual and financial malpractices, may lead to any or a combination of any of the following disciplinary actions:



Disciplinary actions

- Query
- Warning (verbal or written)
- Withholding of salary(ies)
- Suspension of salary(ies)
- Suspension from the teaching profession
- Deletion from the payroll
- Deregistration
- Withdrawal or cancellation of teaching licence
- Dismissal from the teaching profession and matter handed over to the Sierra Leone Police (in cases of proven sexual, financial and examination malpractices)
- Perpetrators of sexual violence will be added to the National Register for SRGBV perpetrators

It is mandatory for the Head teacher and School Safety Committee to report serious misconduct of any school staff (e.g., drug abuse, extreme corporal punishment, sexual harassment, sexual violence, etc) to the police and the TSC District Office.

Complaints should be submitted on the TSC Grievance Redress Mechanism, which is located on the Teacher Management Information System and can be accessed at: <https://tsctmis.org/complaints>.

This form is for any person who wishes to file a complaint against a teacher or education personnel. It collects personal details of the person submitting the complaint, as well as information about the complaint and of the accused person.

2. National Referral Protocol (2024)

The National Referral Protocol (NRP) is a multi-sector government document designed to support and strengthen school safety systems. It establishes clear pathways for all students to safely report incidents and receive support and service linkages in response to cases of SRGBV, including psychological, physical and sexual violence in schools and around schools. The NRP is meant to be applied to issues related to Gender-Based-Violence in and outside of the education system.

It includes four key steps, but the two first steps are the ones relevant for the SSC: 1) A report is made and 2) Referrals are made to ensure immediate needs are met.

Step 1. A report is made

Reports can be made to any person, official or not, e.g. teachers, head teachers, health workers, police officers, hotlines, etc.

Goal: Ensure reporting is accessible, safe and confidential. Any report is referred immediately to the appropriate next service to take timely action.

Existing reporting mechanisms: hotlines (e.g. 112, 116, 8060), FSO, OSC, schools, health centres, police. Survivors could use these or other safe option.

Immediate Action

- Any service provider (including TSC staff member) who is informed by a survivor about their experience of sexual abuse has a responsibility to provide honest and complete information about services available and to make sure the survivor receives support throughout the process.
- Informed consent/assent should be sought from the survivor (and caregiver in case of child survivors) before providing services. **No action should be taken without the expressed permission of the survivor/care giver within the limits of the law.**
- Find out if she/he is injured and in need of emergency medical care.
- The child should receive equal and fair treatment regardless of their age, gender, ability/disability, etc.
- Ensure the survivor knows that the school authorities believe their account of what happened and that it is open and willing to support them.
- Follow the appropriate reporting protocol (NRP) while maintaining confidentiality and sharing information only on a need-to-know basis. Inform the child of this reporting protocol and discuss concerns before sharing any information.
- Try to establish whether the child knows the perpetrator and whether that person is a staff member of TSC or otherwise affiliated with the institution.
- Start to keep a confidential log of all communications and decisions for the response process with the survivor's consent.

Step 2. Referrals are made to ensure immediate needs are met

The immediate services accessed, and in what order, depends on the incident and needs of the survivor. Services must include medical or health care, psychosocial support, case management, legal aid, and police.

Goal: Ensure that (i) immediate care and needs of the survivor are met; (ii) evidence can be collected; and (iii) appropriate referrals to, or signposting of, other services can be made.

Survivors need professional support and case management for immediate referrals, safe access to services, evidence collection and coordination of services.

What to do within 24-72 hrs:

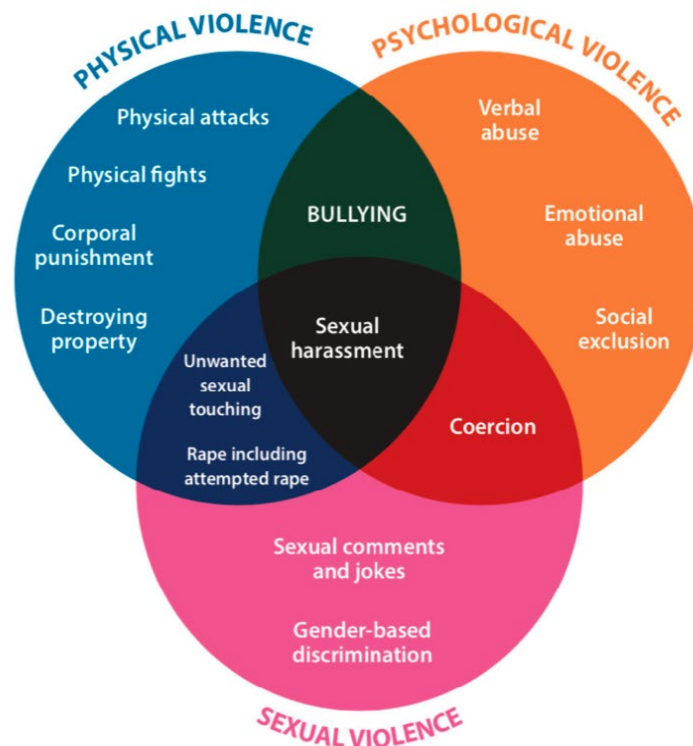
- If the alleged perpetrator is a school staff, make arrangements to remove that person from any environment where they could pose a risk to the other children.
- Make referrals: with the survivor's/caregiver's consent, reach out to medical and psychological service providers through the e-referral pathway (www.sl.erefer.org) or through the local service providers' map or network previously identified and with whom the school has agreements (preferably).
- Organise transportation for the survivor if there is a need to travel for medical assessment and care.
- Accompany the survivor and provide them with support if they choose to report the incident to the police, the OSC or the Rainbo Centre.
- If the alleged perpetrator is a staff member, suspend all their work activities/targets if the allegations are severe.
- Ensure that the alleged perpetrator is treated in a neutral manner and arrange for an independent trained investigator to ask them about the incident.

Section 3: SRGBV concepts

- **Gender-Based Violence (GBV):** An umbrella term for any harmful act that is perpetrated against a person's will and that is based on socially ascribed (gender) differences between males and females. It includes acts that inflict physical, sexual, or mental harm or suffering, threats of such acts, coercion, and other deprivations of liberty.
- **Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV):** It encompasses an array of acts where power is abused and can include, but is not limited to, verbal harassment, inappropriate touching, assault through rape and murder. It can include sexual harassment in the workplace, sexual exploitation and abuse towards beneficiaries of aid and support. The policy and legal framework for Sierra Leone also specifically mention trafficking, violence against women in politics, child and early marriage, sexual abuse and sexual assault, adolescent pregnancy and Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). (SGBV Response Strategy SLE).

- **School-Related Gender Based Violence (SRGBV):** An act or threat of sexual, physical, or psychological violence occurring in and around schools that is perpetrated as a result of gender norms and stereotypes and enforced by unequal power dynamics. It includes different types of violence in and around schools, including sexual abuse and harassment, coercion and assault and rape, as well as other forms of violence where gender is a key driving factor, such as verbal abuse and bullying (UNESCO & UN Women, 2016).
- **Sexual Exploitation:** Any actual or attempted abuse of a position of vulnerability, differential power, or trust, for sexual purposes, including, but not limited to, profiting monetarily, socially or politically from the sexual exploitation of another.
- **Sexual Abuse** is further defined as “the actual or threatened physical intrusion of a sexual nature, whether by force or under unequal or coercive conditions.”
- **Sexual Harassment:** Any unwelcome sexual advance, request for sexual favour, verbal or physical conduct or gesture of a sexual nature, or any other behaviour of a sexual nature that might reasonably be expected or be perceived to cause offence or humiliation.
- **Gender stereotypes:** Socially constructed and unquestioned beliefs about the different characteristics, roles and relations of women and men that are seen as true and unchangeable. Gender stereotypes are reproduced and reinforced through processes such as the education and upbringing of girls and boys, as well as the influence of media.
- **Gender discrimination** describes the situation in which people are treated differently simply because they are male or female, rather than on the basis of their individual skills or capabilities. For example, social exclusion, inability to participate in decision-making processes, and restricted access to and control of services and resources are common results of discrimination.
- **Gender Equality** means that women and men, girls and boys enjoy the same status in society; have the same entitlements to all human rights; enjoy the same level of respect in the community; can take advantage of the same opportunities to make choices about their lives; and have the same amount of power to shape the outcomes of these choices.
- **Gender Equity:** Gender equity means being fair to women and men, girls and boys. To ensure fairness, measures are put into place to address social or historical discrimination and disadvantages faced by girls relative to boys.

Figure 6. Different forms of SRGBV



Section 4: Additional resources

- **Guide for setting up a school safety system to reduce violence in schools.** Available at <https://mbsseknowledgeplatform.gov.sl/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Guide-for-setting-up-a-school-safety-system-to-reduce-violence-in-schools.pdf>
- **Comprehensive School Safety Policy (2023).** Available at https://planipolis.iiep.unesco.org/sites/default/files/ressources/sierra_leone_comprehensive_school_safety_policy_2023_eng.pdf
- **Teachers Code of Conduct.** Available at <https://mbsseknowledgeplatform.gov.sl/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Code-of-conduct-for-teachers-and-other-educational-personnel-in-Sierra-Leone.pdf>
- **National Referral Protocol.** Available at <https://mbsseknowledgeplatform.gov.sl/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/National-Referral-Protocol-on-Sexual-and-Gender-Based-Violence-report.pdf>