

August 2014

WEBSITE AND SCHOOL POSTING: Imagine School at Palmer Ranch

FLORIDA LAW AND REPORTING CHILD ABUSE

Florida's laws on child abuse and the failure to report child abuse are among the toughest in the nation. The law states that **ANY PERSON** who witnesses or has reasonable cause to believe that a child has been physically or emotionally abused, neglected, abandoned, or sexually abused has a duty to report the abuse to the Department of Children and Family services or to local law enforcement. **ANY PERSON** means everyone, a minor or an adult, who has contact with or develops reasonable cause that abuse has occurred. Imagine Schools' employees will report any instance where there is reasonable cause to believe any person has abused a child, whether the abuse occurs on or off the campus of the school. Further, Imagine Schools' employees will forward, without making a credibility judgment, any complaints of abuse given to them by any person whatsoever to the appropriate authorities. **ANY PERSON** who fails to report abuse of a child, including instructional personnel or administrators of Imagine Schools, may be charged with a third degree felony punishable by up to five years in prison and a \$5,000 fine.

If you suspect a child is in immediate danger, **call 911**. Otherwise, if you have reasonable cause to believe a child has been physically or emotionally abused, neglected, or abandoned, please make a report immediately to the Florida Department of Children and Families at 1-800-96-ABUSE (1-800-962-2873) or fax the report to 1-800-914-0004. You may also call the Sarasota County Sheriff's Office at **941-861-5800**.

Imagine Schools will also assist you in the reporting of child abuse. If you have reasonable cause to believe a student at Imagine Schools has been abused, including by any employee of Imagine Schools, please immediately notify one of the following persons: **Alisa Wright, Principal, 941-923-1125 -Kathy Helean, Region Director and Debbie Tisdale, Administrative Assistant, 941-750-0900 ext. 215**

Abandonment means a situation in which the parent or legal guardian of a child or, in the absence of a parent or legal guardian, the caregiver, while being able, has made no significant contribution to the child's care and maintenance or has failed to establish or maintain a substantial and positive relationship with the child, or both. "Establish or maintain a substantial and positive relationship" includes, but is not limited to, frequent and regular contact with the child through frequent and regular visitation or frequent and regular communication to or with the child, and the exercise of parental rights and responsibilities. Marginal efforts and incidental or token visits or communications are not sufficient to establish or maintain a substantial and positive relationship with a child.

Abuse means any willful act or threatened act that results in any physical, mental, or sexual abuse, injury, or harm that causes or is likely to cause the child's physical, mental, or emotional health to be significantly impaired. Abuse of a child includes acts or omissions. Corporal

discipline of a child by a parent or legal custodian for disciplinary purposes does not in itself constitute abuse when it does not result in harm to the child.

Neglect occurs when a child is deprived of, or is allowed to be deprived of, necessary food, clothing, shelter, or medical treatment or a child is permitted to live in an environment when such deprivation or environment causes the child's physical, mental, or emotional health to be significantly impaired or to be in danger of being significantly impaired. The foregoing circumstances shall not be considered neglect if caused primarily by financial inability unless actual services for relief have been offered to and rejected by such person. A parent or legal guardian legitimately practicing religious beliefs in accordance with a recognized church or religious organization who thereby does not provide specific medical treatment for a child may not, for that reason alone, be considered a negligent parent or legal custodian.

Thank you.