

Addressing School Safety in Uganda

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The Uganda Program for Human and Holistic Development (UPHOLD) is a five-year program designed to assist Ugandans to offer and use quality social services in three sectors: Education, Health and HIV/AIDS.

Financial support for this publication is provided by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Cooperative Agreement number 617-A-00-02-00012-00. The views expressed in this document do not necessarily reflect those of USAID.

UPHOLD is implemented by JSI Research & Training Institute, Inc., in collaboration with Education Development Center, Inc. (EDC), Constella Futures Group, The Malaria Consortium, The Manoff Group, Inc., and World Education, Inc.

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Acknowledgements

The Safe School Contract was produced with funding provided by the United States Agency for International development (USAID), through the Uganda Program for Human and Holistic Development (UPHOLD), with the concerted effort of a wide range of stakeholders, who contributed their time and expertise on how to involve parents, guardians, teachers, community leaders and children themselves in promoting the safety in schools.

Appreciation is extended to the Ministry of Education and Sports, the Education Offices of the districts where UPHOLD operates, the Core Primary Teachers Colleges, Head teachers, teachers, parents, communities and children of the pilot schools for their commitment to improve the safety of their primary schools.

Sincere gratitude is also extended to the UPHOLD technical team: Dorothy Aanyu Angura, Lisa Sherburn, Elizabeth Ekochu, Apollo Nkwake, Samson Kironde and Onesmus Dralega whose contributions, ideas and wealth of experience have enriched this document.

Special thanks are extended to World Education, JSI and UPHOLD management team whose support contributed a lot to the success of this work.

Great appreciation is extended to Lisa Sherburne, who helped to develop the final document on how to operationalize Safe School Contracts in primary schools.

List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
CIE	Community Involvement in Education
CIEA	Community Involvement in Education Advisor
CCT	Coordinating Centre Tutor
CSO	Civil Society Organizations
CPTC	Core Primary Teachers' Colleges
DEO	District Education Officer
DIS	District Inspector of Schools
EMSI	Education Management Strengthening Initiative
HIV	Human Immuno Virus
IS	Inspector of Schools
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MoES	Ministry of Education and Sports
PIASCY	Presidential Initiative on AIDS Strategy for Communication to Youth
PTA	Parents teachers Association
TE	Teacher Effectiveness
SMCs	School Management Committees
UPE	Universal Primary Education
UPHOLD	Uganda Program for Human and Holistic Development
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

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Abstract

Addressing school safety in Uganda

Safety as an important aspect of quality learning has been inadequately addressed under Universal Primary Education (UPE) in Uganda. A study found that 84% and 76% of pupils reported to have observed or experienced violence against girls and boys respectively. Teachers were identified as perpetrators by 17% (Action Aid International, 2004). Abuse causes health risks, school drop out and failure to achieve full potential among children. Since 2005, JSI/UPHOLD, a USAID-funded project that works in 34 districts of Uganda, has supported the Ministry of Education and Sports to introduce Safe School Contracts (SSCs) to more than 200 primary schools. Teachers and pupils sign the SSC where teachers agree to protect pupils from abuse while pupils identify three or four safety friends. Focus group discussions and interviews were conducted with pupils and teachers to explore their experiences. Pupils reported positive changes like increased confidence, less tension on school grounds, less harassment and reduced assaults. The paper draws on the experiences of school-community stakeholders involved in Action-oriented Meetings (AOMs) where discussions on sensitive issues concerning children's safety is conducted in schools and practical solutions are drawn to improve the learning environment. It examines the benefits of SSCs and discusses how it contributes to improving the safety of pupils in schools. The benefits of SSCs outlined by the different stakeholders include: collective responsibility of stakeholders' roles in creating safe learning environment for children in schools and effective child participation in promoting their own safety with support of teachers, parents and communities that motivates them to be part of the school. Based on these testimonies and what has been observed, safety of children in and out of school is crucial, and SSCs is an effective way of promoting safety in schools. The paper also discusses key challenges in implementing SSCs in Uganda. The key lessons learnt from the stakeholders who have adopted the SSC strategy are: 1) Promotion of collective responsibility among school-community stakeholders, 2) SSCs needs to be discussed and shared widely among all stakeholders; and 3) SSC are easy to sustain and can be adopted by schools at no or low cost. Through the experiences of the 200 schools in the UPHOLD supported districts in Uganda to date, it is evident that this strategy offers a feasible mechanism for promoting safety in schools through strengthening school-community partnerships and child participation.

1.0. Introduction

Safety as an important aspect of quality learning has been inadequately addressed under Universal Primary Education (UPE) in Uganda. This paper discusses the response of the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) through the introduction of Safe School Contracts (SSCs) in primary schools in Uganda in partnership with a USAID funded project Uganda Program for Human and Holistic Development (JSI/WEI/UPHOLD). It defines SSCs, procedures of its implementation at school-community level, methods of data collection and results so far realized with regard to pupils' safety in schools in Uganda from the perspectives of different stakeholders who have been engaged in implementing and evaluating the SSC strategy. It also outlines key challenges associated with SSCs and makes recommendations for overcoming them. This paper presents evidence to show that the SSC is a viable, exciting and sustainable strategy to making schools safer for pupils.

1.1 Background

Uganda has signed and ratified international agreements that recognize education as a right to everyone such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights – UDHR- (1948); the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), the World Declaration on Education for All in Jomtien and the Dakar Framework for Action (April 2000). The Government of Uganda has pledged to achieve the commitments agreed to in Goal 2 and 3 of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to ensure that “all boys and girls complete a full course of primary schooling” by 2015, (World Education Forum, 2000). At the national level, the Constitution of the Republic of Uganda (1995) stipulates that “all persons have a right to education” (Chapter 4, art.30), and Universal Primary Education (UPE) for all school-going age children was instituted in 1997 and the Education Sector Investment Plan (ESIP) which supports UPE was adopted in 1998.

As a result of these policies, access to primary education has increased. Enrollment rose by almost 51% from 2.7 million children in 1997 to 5.3 million in 1999 (MoES, 2002) and 7.1 million in 2005 (MoES, 2005)

However, while access has been achieved, quality is still a problem. Development partners like the national government, district governments and communities, parents and private sector partners, have tried to respond to the infrastructural aspects of quality, but safety of the learning environment has not been adequately addressed.

Safety is an important aspect of quality learning that has remained inadequately addressed to date. Malinga et al (2005) defines quality as a school with good physical, health, safe, friendly learning environment without violence and hostility, drug-free and well equipped with facilities that offer a wide range of curricular and co-curricular activities.

However, a study by Action Aid International in Uganda in 2004 found that 84% of pupils reported to have observed or experienced violence against girls, whereas 76% of pupils had observed or experienced violence against boys. Teachers were identified as perpetrators by 17%, (Action Aid International, 2004). In addition to serious health risks, abuse results in poor performance at school, absenteeism, and early drop-outs. The same report indicated that nearly one-fifth of the girls who left primary school early were victims of abuse (recorded as defilement, pregnancy or early marriage) according to school registers.

The above report indicates that, despite free education through the introduction of UPE in Uganda in 1997, safety in school environment has continuously deteriorated due to increased numbers of pupils, different forms of child abuse and social economic pressures, leading to high school drop out rates and low completion rates. This paper discusses Safe School Contracts (SSCs) as a one of the identified school interventions which strengthens the roles of teachers, pupils and parents and their involvement in children's education to enhance quality learning and creating safer children's environment both within the school and at home.

The Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) and the USAID-funded UPHOLD Project introduced more than 200 primary schools to Safe Schools Contracts (SSCs) as one of the many ways of improving safety of pupils in schools. The strategy of SSC is implemented both as part of the Presidential Initiative on Aids Strategy Communication to Youth (PIASCY) and the Community Involvement in Education (CIE) program. PIASCY and devoted to helping pupils stay safe from HIV/AIDS. In 2004, 45,000 teachers from 15,000 schools in 56 districts were trained in delivering messages to pupils on HIV/AIDS prevention through PIASCY while over 2,832 schools have so far been reached with CIE through action-oriented meeting at the school-community level on how to keep pupils safe.

2.0. Details of the Project Intervention

2.1 Main objectives:

The main objective of a (SSC) is to increase active participation of pupils, teachers and parents in practically promoting a safer school environment and quality learning.

2.2 The specific objectives of the SSC are:

1. To increase the ability of pupils to avoid risky situations as well as create a more risky free environment by walking together in groups according to the Safe School Contracts Guidelines, (2004)
2. To empower children to defend and support each other's safety,
3. To remind teachers, parents and other duty bearers about their roles in ensuring the safety of pupils and safe learning environment both in school and in the community
4. To increase communication between teachers, pupils and parents on children's safety in schools.

2.3. What are Safe School Contracts?

(SSCs) aim at creating school environment where pupils can concentrate on learning without fearing for their safety. It reminds teachers of their Code of Conduct, calls for greater safety of pupils through 'safety friends' and has space for all teachers' and pupils' to sign the contract as a declaration of their commitment to promote safety of all children in their school. The SSC is then posted at a strategic place on school grounds where everyone can see it as a reminder of their agreements. **(See copy of a SSC in appendix 1)**

2.4. Introducing the Safe School Contract at School Level

The SSC is introduced to a school through an action-oriented meeting where teachers, parents, community leaders participate in a discussion on safety. They talk about what risky situations exist in their schools and communities that make children vulnerable to defilement and HIV/AIDS. They identify the issues, what safety means, the consequences of not having a safe environment for pupils, and ways to improve the safety of their children. They discuss the SSC and how to implement it in their schools. Once these agreements are made, the head teacher and all the teachers sign the contract as a commitment on their part to: provide guidance and counseling to all pupils, provide

education, exemplary leadership for pupils and other members of society by word, deed and attitude, protect pupils against all form of abuse and assist pupils to form safety friends.

Once the SSC has been adopted by the teachers, the pupils are engaged in a discussion where pupils identify friends with whom to walk and work with in small groups. The children also sign the SSC as a binding agreement to become “safety friends”; move together to and from school each day and when called to teachers’ rooms or homes. Pupils usually select three to four “safety friends”. When pupils sign the SSC, they are expected to mentor, support and monitor each other’s movements whereby no member of the safety friends’ team is expected to be alone with a teacher (except in the counseling room); while teachers pledge to protect pupils from all forms of abuse and lead by example. (Safe School Contract Guidelines, 2004)

In order to strengthen the safety of children in schools pupils who become safety friends are given a badge as an identity for their commitment to promoting safety in their school. Senior women and men teachers were trained by UPHOLD and the MoES on how to improve the safety of pupils in schools in Uganda. A total of 45,000 teachers have also been trained to provide guidance and counseling to boys and girls in their schools on how to avoid risky behaviours such bad peer groups, assertiveness in response to sexual demands from teachers and others and how to engage in activities that help pupils to abstain from early sex.

2.5. Coverage

Over 200 schools have so far adopted the SSC strategy although over 3,000 schools have so far been oriented on the SSC through action-oriented meetings. This is because action-

oriented meetings focus on several issues affecting the quality of pupils learning in primary schools. Several issues are discussed ranging from hygiene, sanitation, homework, visiting the classroom to monitor what children are learning and to discuss with teachers pupils' performance, feeding, girl child education, retention and safety. Schools prioritize their actions according to their immediate needs. Some schools start with feeding, others home work, visiting pupils in class, hygiene while over 200 schools have prioritized safety as a big issue in their schools and adopted the SSC as a strategy for improving the quality of learning for their children.

Using district supervisors, head teachers and teachers in over 1,140 schools countrywide have been oriented on action-oriented meetings focusing on PIASCY. They in turn, have successfully held the AOMs in these schools. At the end of term three 2006, successful AOMs had been conducted in 1,078 models schools. According to the PIASCY work plan, 15 persons are specifically selected by the school administration to convene at the school and discuss proposed issues on the agenda concerning reducing risky situations that increase children vulnerability to contracting HIV such as rape, defilement, lack parental care and support, stigma and discrimination (UPHOLD 2005c). On the other hand, over 2,832 schools have had AOMs in which over 300,000 parents, teachers and pupils have discussed issues affecting pupils' safety.

3.0 Sources of data

Information on the number of action oriented meetings and adoption of SSC in schools is collected through the program's monitoring and evaluation system. Schools prepare monthly reports, and they submit them to coordinating centers. Coordinating centers prepare summaries for reports from schools and submit them to Core Primary Teacher

Colleges, which in turn submit them to UPHOLD through the Ministry of Education and Sports (UPHOLD, 2005d).

Another source of information is the evaluation study conducted on UPHOLD's Integrated Education Strategy between August and December 2006 (UPHOLD). This survey collected data from 642 teachers and 444 school children in 18 districts of Uganda, who were asked to assess the level of parent's involvement in various activities of the school, including action-oriented meetings. Findings of this study reveal the magnitude of parents' participation in action-oriented meetings. This source of information does not only indicate the level of community response to the intervention, it also attempts to illustrate the outcomes of the intervention by relating parental participation in action-oriented meetings with impact at school level.

In addition to survey data, another source of information is reports of support supervision visits. Support supervision visits are conducted regularly, within UPHOLD supported district program's monitoring and evaluation framework. For example, Between September and December 2006, 527 primary schools across the country were visited by a team involving UPHOLD, Core Primary Teachers' Colleges and District Education Office staff. The supervision visits generated various observations that were documented in supervision reports. Information from supervision reports indicates that action oriented meetings are increasing parents' involvement in school affairs, which is consequently improving the safety of children in and out of school.

10 Focus Group discussions were also held with parents, pupils, teachers and community leaders involved in implementing the SSC in their schools during routine support

supervision visits and some of the details of their responses are documented in the outcomes below.

4.0. Outcomes of implementing the SSC Strategy

From the perspectives of different stakeholders who were engaged in Focus group discussions during routine program monitoring in the field some positive results were revealed as discussed below.

Focus Group Discussions revealed a sense of collective responsibility among parents, teachers and pupils to ensure all pupils are kept safe in and out of school, with teachers feeling less defensive about “abuse” issues and willing to work to protect pupils at their schools. Soon after signing the SSC, a teacher remarked,

“Count on us, we take the SSC seriously and will offer safety and protection for pupils, even outside the school.” Teacher, Arua Demonstration School.

Head teachers who were interviewed about effects of the adoption of the SSC said its impact on pupils’ safety was very significant because,

“It has helped to change the behaviour of teachers and children. The word safety brought the whole essence out. It is a broader perspective to include conditions in classrooms, the compound and latrines” Head teacher of Kakabala primary school in Luwero district

Teachers have found out that the discussions around the SSC have made them more aware of pupils’ safety needs.

“Most importantly, negative attitudes of teachers towards pupils that make them develop unhealthy relationship with pupils have changed. We ensure total protection for these

children who have been entrusted to us in all aspects because safe learning promotes good performance in schools". A teacher in Arua district explained

It was further explained by the games teachers that the SSC has improved safety in schools,

"With the introduction of the SSC, girls walked in groups and avoided being outside alone after dark – the school has passed two seasons with greater participation and no problems of defilement or harassments of girls." Games teacher,

Community leaders noted that SSCs has greatly assisted the process to involve the community members. Members of school Management committees and local leaders witnessed the signing of the SSCs in Arua district where a local leader explained,

"The children belong to us and we have a big collective responsibility towards their up bringing".

Pupils have also noticed profound changes in their environment. They report that the feeling of safety and teamwork at their school has improved. Girls report less harassment by boys and reduced assaults, as a 14-year-old girl in Luwero District shared,

"When I am talking to teachers these days, I feel safer because I always have a friend with me. Most of us used to fear approaching male teachers, but now we do not since we do it in pairs. The friends I chose also help me through social and class problems in and out of school."

A 13 year old girl talked about similar experiences.

“I found “safety friends” whom I ask to escort me whenever I have to go to a teacher’s home. These friends know whatever is wrong if I am not able to come to school.”

Another 10 year old pupil had this to report at the UPHOLD National Education Conference (July 2007),

“safety friends has empowered me to help young ones in lower classes stay safe from HIV/AIDS. This is what I tell them, Walk in groups so that if you meet strangers on the way and he wants to rape you, your friends can make an alarm to scare of the stranger, but if you walk alone, a stranger might rape you and you get HIV/AIDS. Please children, do not walk alone at night if you want to stay safe from HIV/AIDS. Sit and discuss with your friends how you can keep each other safe” Primary Five pupil-Adyel primary school-Lira district.

Pupils feel more empowered because they realize that like teachers, they can help make their school safer by looking out for each other and supporting each other to remain safe. This was emphasized by one of the children who was interviewed,

“We visit one another and receive good advice from our friends and their parents.” Pupil
Kakabala primary school- Luwero district.

UPHOLD Education Conference Report, (2007), confirms that when children are empowered with life skills, knowledge, attitudes and practices, they can take charge of their own security and safety with support from adults. For example, through the safety friends and safe school contracts, children in schools that adopted the UPHOLD initiated

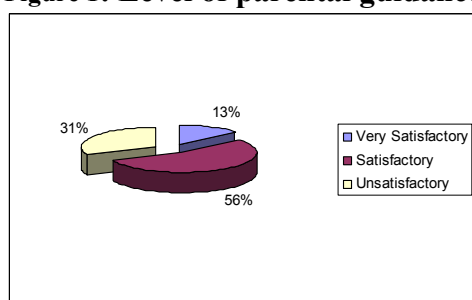
strategy in 34 districts of Uganda have realized improved safety and safe learning environments in schools.

4.1. Using Action Oriented Meetings (AOMs) to focus on children's' Safety

One of the key items discussed in action oriented meetings and agreed upon in action plans is that parents should talk to their children about risky situations. In AOMs, it is emphasized that the safety of children is a role of both the school and the community especially the parents/guardians. UPHOLD Program reports and survey information, (2007) indicate that action oriented meetings are eliciting safety of children at school.

The findings of UPHOLD's Integrated Education Strategy (IES) formative evaluation show that most parents are involved in talking to their children about risky situations and avoiding HIV. Figure 3 below shows that 69% of the teachers surveyed, reported that parents' guidance for children on risky situations was at least satisfactory, compared to 31% who reported that parents' guidance for children on risky situations was not satisfactory.

Figure 1: Level of parental guidance for children on risky situations



Source: Survey data education formative evaluation (UPHOLD,)

Furthermore, teachers were asked to mention the measures that their schools have put in place to ensure safety of vulnerable groups like girl child both at school and in the

communities. 26% mentioned educating them about avoiding risky situations, 41% mentioned providing safe environment while 78% mentioned providing counseling and guidance services to children in order to promote their safety both in schools and communities. ($p = .000$ [ibid]).

The evidence presented above suggests that action oriented meetings are playing a vital role in HIV prevention at schools, through increasing parental involvement. Supervision reports confirm this relationship. For example, in Asinge Primary School, Tororo District, parents are involved in giving talks to pupils on school assemblies. This was also reported in Kyengeza Primary School in Mityana District. In Kakindu Primary School, Mubende District, parents have been reported to be involved in clearing bushes along the paths leading to the school, to prevent defilement and rape of children as they move to and from school. In Kabamba Primary School, Mubende District, parents have been reported to be involved in collectively following up and reporting defilement cases to authorities (UPHOLD 2007).

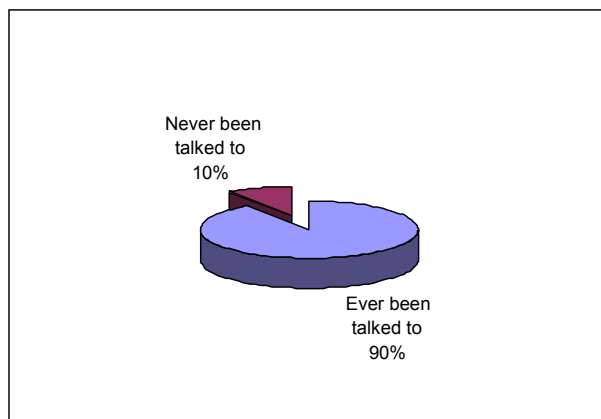
4.2. Children's understanding of risks

The formative evaluation also found out that the effort to create safer school environments for children has involved educating children about risky situations. The study sought to ascertain the extent to which children would identify various risky situations. 76.1% reported that accepting a person they do not know to take you away could lead them to being sexually abused. 83.1% reported that children at their schools do not accept to be taken away by people they do not know. 92.1% reported that if a person they do not know gave them a gift or money, they would not accept. 74% reported that going to teacher's houses alone without someone accompanying them could lead them

into being sexually abused. 80.2% reported that children in their schools do not go to teachers' houses alone without some one someone accompanying them.

Children were asked to mention some one that talked to them about risky situations at school. As shown in the figure below, most children (90%) reported having ever been talked to, only 10% reported not having been talked to about avoiding risky situations. 90.8% reported that they had been talked to by their head teachers. 97.8% had been talked to by their teachers. 95.2% reported that they had been talked to by their senior women teachers

Figure 2: Children's reporting on having received guidance about risky situations



5.0 Challenges

One of the challenges revealed by supervision reports is that of motivation of parents to attend action-oriented meetings. Some parents expect incentives like food and transport facilitation when they attend such meetings.

These reports also indicate that schools mostly involve parents in action-oriented meetings and tend to leave out other members of the community who may not have children going to those schools, but have useful input to the betterment of the schools.

At the same time, the findings of UPHOLD's Education Formative Evaluation survey discussed in the preceding section indicate that although there is a satisfactory level of parents' participation in action-oriented meetings, adoption of the SSC and in the implementation of action plans, there remains room for improvement. Fourteen percent (14%) of the 644 teachers interviewed reported that parents were not involved in action-oriented meetings, hence did not get involved in the adoption of the SSC and 22% reported that parents were not involved in the implementation of action plans emanating from the action oriented meetings in their schools including the SSC.

6.0 Lessons learned

The safety situation in a school can be done using the interactive SSC through the collective assessment, dialogue and agreement on collective action of parents, teachers, the community and pupils to improve the safety of pupils in school and the learning environment. to pupils' safety in schools can be improved. Hence ensuring safety in schools depends on all stakeholders (parents, teachers, pupils and community leaders.)

“We shall not wait for school. The safety of pupils should not be left to schools alone”

Helen, Leader of the Mother Union in Arua district

The SSC is a simple tool that has been used to effectively address the complex and sensitive topic of sexual harassment of young people in schools in Uganda. It is easy to use because it focuses on a positive action “safety friends” that everyone can promote, rather than prohibiting and punishing teachers. This means that the process of engaging stakeholders in dialogue about critical and sensitive issues that affect children can serve to change the paradigm of thinking and can enable stakeholders to establish simple and practical solutions to mitigate risky situations that school children would otherwise be

exposed to. It is therefore important to create an atmosphere of collective responsibility with all primary school stakeholders especially local community leaders who play a key role in mobilizing parents and community members for school activities to create safe learning environment.

The SSC is used to facilitate dialogue, establish protective norms & create healthy learning environments.

Another key lesson learned from supervision reports is that the engagement of local leaders is an effective means of mobilizing parents and communities for school activities to create safe learning environment.

7.0 Recommendations

It is recommended that implementation of SSC in schools and follow up in schools and communities should be done by all stakeholders. Regular meetings of school-community stakeholders should be organized to assess progress and document outcomes.

There is need to intensify documentation of the experiences of the SSCs and sharing with the rest of the world

JSI/UPHOLD should lobby the MoES and other development partners to scale up the SSC to more schools in Uganda.

There is need for encouragement of all parents to appreciate the value of their involvement in the affairs of their children's learning in schools and at home in order to ensure that their children's learning environment is improved.

There is need for schools to create more awareness among parents and communities on the importance of their involvement in promoting safe learning environment for their children in schools and at home.

8.0. Conclusion

Addressing School Safety for pupils (in relation to prevention of HIV/AIDS, defilement and other health risks), can be achieved through strong partnerships where school-community actors engage in dialogue that leads to practical agreements that are documented for reference and action. Action-oriented meetings, school rules and regulations and adopting SSCs present good options. However, the SSC provides the most viable, exciting and sustainable low cost strategy to this effect with the active involvement of parents, teachers and above all pupils themselves in ensuring their own safety in schools.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Safe School Contract tool used to address safety in schools in Uganda.

S A F E S C H O O L CONTRACT

Teachers

I will not see pupils alone except in a counseling room

I will report safety concerns without delay.

I will act with honor & bravery to protect pupils' safety & future.

NAME & SIGNATURE	TITLE
	Head Teacher
	Deputy

As a professional teacher under UPE policy, I have the responsibility to:

1. Provide appropriate guidance and counselling to all pupils and parents; Provide education, exemplary leadership, positive example for pupils and other members of staff ,parents and communities by word, deed and attitude
2. Protect pupils against abuses of all forms,
3. Help pupils form Safety Friends

Therefore, in the interest of ensuring safety of all pupils at school, I will never call a pupil to my classroom or home without their friends.

1. Pupils must select 3 to 4 friends who will be responsible for accompanying that pupil if she or he is called to a teacher's room after class or to a teacher's home.
2. This means that a pupil should not be alone with a teacher in his/her room/house except in a counselling room
3. Report any teacher observed alone with a pupil to the Head Teacher without delay.
4. Report any safety concern to the Head Teacher or Senior Woman /Man Teacher without delay or fear of consequences.

Pupils

I will bring 3 to 4 of my friends if called to a teachers' room after class or to his or her home. I will discuss about safety with my Friends
I will report safety concerns without delay.

NAME & CLASS	<i>NAME & CLASS</i>

Let's Keep Our Pupils Safe!

To safeguard pupils' futures and their ability to attend school safely, please use this Safe School Contract.

During an assembly explain to pupils that:

- Their safety is of paramount importance.
- Each pupil should select 3 to 4 “safety friends.”
- All teachers and pupils should sign the Safe School contract to show that they agree to use and enforce “safety friends”:-
- Safety friends can walk to and from school together to stay safe en route and even when one pupil is called to a teacher's room to carry books or clean boards or if a pupil is called to a teacher's home for any reason.
- Pupils should sit with peers, teachers, parents and discuss safety issues and agree on solutions and implement and review regularly
- The contract will be posted in a strategic place for all to remember.
- If anyone violates the contract by walking or going alone, they should be reported to the Head Teacher or Deputy or senior man/woman teacher without delay.