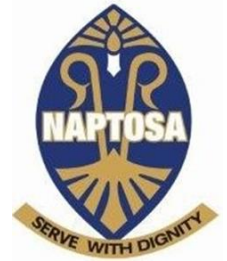


# NATIONAL NEWS FLASH



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## CHILD PROTECTION WEEK 2021

South Africa this week (1-7 June 2021) commemorates Child Protection Week. The purpose is to highlight the rights, but also the plight, of our children.

The rights of children are protected by the Constitution. Over and above the rights that apply to all citizens, of which the right to basic education is surely one of the most important as far as children are concerned, the following child-specific rights are *inter alia* also provided for-

- family care or parental care, or appropriate alternative care;
- basic nutrition, shelter, basic health care services and social services;
- protection from maltreatment, neglect, abuse or degradation;
- protection from exploitative labour practices

Sadly, despite the protection afforded by the Constitution and other legislation, children in South Africa still suffer abuse, neglect and exploitation and remain vulnerable.

The COVID-19 pandemic has in many respects foregrounded the plight of children. Reports of heightened cases of abuse of children were common during the hard lockdown phase and even now, with schools following a rotational system, many children are left vulnerable, having to remain at home by themselves.

This is why NAPTOSA has always, in line with recognised science, advocated that the safest place for children during the day is at school. However, not wanting to substitute one evil for another, we have consistently called for the required health protocols and materials to be in place before children are returned to school. Our support for the return to school of all primary school learners on 26 July 2021 is therefore subject to the same conditions as well as the science that will prevail at that stage.

Not only have children suffered physically during the pandemic period, but equally on an educational and psychological level. Educationists are in agreement that the extraordinary amount of teaching and learning time lost will be hard to recover and could be detrimental to learners in the long run, in terms of educational development and achievements. It is therefore critical that all learners be returned to school at the earliest.

In the current circumstances this will only be achievable if government steps up the vaccination roll-out program and prioritises education sector workers. NAPTOSA has been calling for this for some

time. We trust that the Minister's public support for the vaccination of education staff will accelerate the process.

Child Protection Week cannot be commemorated without thanking our members for their role as care givers of learners. Not only do you look after the educational needs of learners, but also their physical and psychological well-being. And in this pandemic time the need for psychological support for learners has become greater than ever while these services remain lacking, placing additional strain on members. Your dedication to learners amid the burden of the pandemic on yourselves and your families deserves the highest praise.

While praise is fitting, NAPTOSA would be failing in its duty if we did not also condemn those members of the education fraternity that continue perpetrating violence, exploitation and abuse, especially sexual abuse, against learners. The introduction recently of regulations that will prevent those found guilty of such actions from ever gaining employment in education again will hopefully become a serious deterrent, but we believe criminal charges should also be instituted in these cases.

May Child Protection Week 2021 become the catalyst for the whole of society to work together to ensure the safety and health of the most vulnerable members of our community.

**BASIL MANUEL**  
**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**