

Our **Duty** to **Care**

The principles
of good practice
for the protection
of children &
young people



DEPARTMENT
OF HEALTH & CHILDREN
AN ROINN SLAINTE
AGUS LEANAÍ

Code of Behaviour between Workers and Children

Your organisation's Code of Behaviour should include positive statements about:

- listening to children
- valuing and respecting children as individuals
- involving children in decision-making, as appropriate
- encouraging and praising children

It is important that your behaviour reflects the child-centred ethos of your organisation.

It is also important for the protection of all concerned that staff, volunteers, children and young people have guidelines on what is expected, and what is not accepted, with respect to their behaviour.

- Workers should be sensitive to the risks involved in participating in contact sports or other activities.
- While physical contact is a valid way of comforting, reassuring and showing concern for children, it should only take place when it is acceptable to all persons concerned.
- Workers should never physically punish or be in any way verbally abusive to a child, nor should they even tell jokes of a sexual nature in the presence of children.
- Workers should be sensitive to the possibility of developing favouritism, or becoming over involved or spending a great deal of time with any one child.
- Children should be encouraged to report cases of bullying to either a designated person, or a worker of their choice. Complaints must be brought to the attention of management.
- It is recommended that each organisation/group develop a positive attitude amongst workers and children that respects the personal space, safety and privacy of individuals.
- It is not recommended that workers give lifts in their cars to individual young people, especially for long journeys.

Anti-Bullying Policy

This is adapted from the Scout Association of Ireland's Child Protection Policy and may provide a useful reference to organisations considering an Anti-Bullying Policy.

WHAT IS BULLYING?

Bullying can be defined as repeated aggression be it verbal, psychological or physical conducted by an individual or group against others.

It is behaviour that is intentionally aggravating and intimidating and occurs mainly in social environments such as schools, clubs and other organisations working with children. It includes behaviours such as teasing, taunting, threatening, hitting and extortion behaviour by one or more children against a victim.

IS BULLYING HARMFUL?

Persistent bullying can have a devastating effect on a child's self esteem. They may feel it's somehow their fault, or that there's something wrong with them, they may become withdrawn and insecure, more cautious, and less willing to take any sort of risk.

Being victimised in this way can cause days of mental anguish and leave lifelong emotional scars. It has driven some young people to try to murder their tormentors and others to suicide. A child who has suffered bullying often needs professional counselling to let out their feelings and rebuild their self-confidence. Bullying also affects any child who witnesses it.

WHAT DO CHILDREN GET BULLIED ABOUT?

Some of the factors involved in bullying include:

- Puberty
- peer pressure
- gender differences
- stereotypes/prejudice
- structure of the group – hierarchy of dominance
- family background of victims and bullies

Bullying can be distinguished from bossiness and boisterous play. A bossy child will boss whoever is around. So often it is due to a lack of self-control or skills of negotiation or compromise. Boisterous play can be dangerous but it does not involve young people wilfully setting out to hurt or victimise. Young people often grow out of this kind of behaviour as they grow older. What distinguishes bullying from bossiness or boisterousness is that the bully always picks on someone less powerful and more vulnerable. Persistent "slagging" which have the same devastating effects as bullying and shouldn't be ignored.

HOW WOULD YOU KNOW IF A CHILD IS BEING BULLIED?

All bullies operate using furtiveness, threats and fear. Bullying can therefore only survive in an environment where the victim does not feel empowered to tell someone who can help or in which it is not safe to do so.

The following indicators are warning signs that a young person might be getting bullied.

- reluctance to come to a centre or take part in activities
- physical signs (unexplained bruises, scratches, or damage to belongings)
- stress-caused illnesses – headaches, and stomach aches which seem unexplained
- fearful behaviour (fear of walking to scout meeting, going different routes, asking to be driven)
- frequent loss of “subs” or shortage of money with vague explanations
- having few friends
- changes in behaviour (withdrawn, stammering, moody, irritable, upset, distressed)
- not eating
- attempting suicide or hinting at suicide
- anxiety (shown by nail-biting, fearfulness, tics)

Of course, there are other possible reasons for many of the above.

WHAT MAKES A PERSON BULLY OTHERS?

Bullies are often making a plea for help through their violent behaviour, which may reflect a sense of insignificance. Bullies whose activities go unaddressed often fail socially and academically in later life. They need to be taught all important negotiation and co-operative skills, working with others rather than competing.

WHO SHOULD DEAL WITH BULLYING?

While the more extreme forms of bullying would be regarded as physical or emotional abuse and are reportable to health board or An Garda Síochána, dealing with bullying behaviour is normally the responsibility of the organisation where it is taking place.

HOW CAN IT BE PREVENTED?

Modules on raising awareness and developing techniques for dealing with bullying should be included in training.

An **Anti Bullying Policy and Code** should be drawn up and enforced and procedures should be clearly established to deal with any incidents. While it is important to have rules about bullying, a whole group policy is the best solution. This means not “bullying the bully” but working with bullies and the group of young people, helping them to understand the hurt they are causing, and so make the problem a “shared concern” of the group. Group discussion methods have a big advantage over punishment in that they do not drive the problem underground or escalate it by making the bully more excluded or more of a social failure. This is known as the **“No blame approach”** (see below).

ARE THERE ANY PRACTICAL STEPS THAT CAN BE USED TO COUNTER BULLYING?

- use young people as a positive resource in countering bullying and to change the culture of the group to a "permission to tell" culture rather than a "might is right" one
- teach young people to negotiate, co-operate and help others, particularly new or different children
- it's a good idea to run poster campaigns and have stories and role plays on how to deal with a bully included in ordinary group activities
- offer victim immediate support and put the "no blame approach" into operation
- never tell a young person to ignore bullying, they can't ignore it, it hurts too much
- never encourage a young person to take the law into their own hands and beat the bully at their own game
- tell the victim there is nothing wrong with them and it is not their fault

WHAT IS THE "NO BLAME" APPROACH?

Step 1. - Interview with the victim

If you find out that there has been an incident of bullying, first talk to the victim.

At this stage find out who was involved and what the victim is now feeling.

Try asking the following questions:

- Was it verbal, physical, intimidation
- How hurt is the victim
- Was it within his/her own peer group
- Ensure the victim that his/her name will not come out in the investigation
- Actively listen

Step 2. - Meet with all involved

Arrange to meet with all those involved, this should include some bystanders, those who may have colluded, those who joined in and those who initiated the bullying.

- Just have maximum of six to eight in the group – keep the number controllable
- Make a point of calling a "special" meeting.
- Ensure the severity of the topic is understood by all.
- Speak only of the hurt caused in general terms with no reference to the victim.
- Play on the conscience of all – ask questions like: How would you feel? Would you like it done to you?

Step 3 - Explain the problem

The distress being suffered as a result of the bullying incident is explained. At this stage the details of the incident or the allocation of the blame/initiators is not discussed. Explain the feelings of loneliness, feeling left out, rejected, laughed at. Try asking these questions:

- Would they like it if it happened to them
- 'Someone here in this group was "bullied" by someone within the group, what can we do to see it does not happen again'
- Listen, watch out for reactions, pick up on any without isolating anyone

Step 4 - Share the responsibility

Explain what steps/controls may have to be introduced to prevent further incidents and how everyone will loose out as a result

Step 5 - Ask the group for their ideas

At this stage the group is encouraged to suggest ways which would make the victim feel happier. All positive responses are noted. Use phrases "if it were you" to encourage a response. Listen to all suggestions and note them

Step 6 - Leave it to them

Now the problem has been identified, solutions suggested, the problem is now handed over to the group to solve. Arrange to meet again in a week's time. Pass responsibility over to the group and give a time frame within which something must be done

Step 7 - Meet them again

th each member of the group, including the bully, discuss how things are going, who is doing what and have there been other incidents. This allows for continual monitoring and also keeps all involved in the process.

Again enforce the idea of the "team" looking after each other at regular intervals to ensure it is known the bullying or intimidating behaviour will not be tolerated.

ANTI BULLYING CODE (PERSONAL SAFETY STATEMENT)

- We provide a place where every member can feel secure
- We provide a place where it is known that bullying is not acceptable behaviour
- We provide a place where name calling is not tolerated
- We provide a place where no one suffers abuse of any nature
- We provide a place where no one is victimised
- We provide a place where each member is supported and listened to
- We provide a place where it is each member's responsibility to ensure that all are treated equal
- We provide a place where solutions to problems are the concern of all

To personalise the above for the different sections/age groups replace "we provide" and adapt the language/terminology to suit the age group.

Sample Child Protection Policy Statement

Your organisation's child protection policy could be something as simple as:
"It is the policy of _____ to safeguard the welfare of all children by protecting them from physical, sexual and emotional harm".

OR

"This _____ Group/Club is fully committed to safeguarding the well-being of its members. Volunteers should, at all times, show respect and understanding for their rights, safety and welfare, and conduct themselves in a way that reflects the principles of the _____ Group/Club".

Or you may want to think about drawing up a more detailed policy statement, for example:

"We in _____ want to make sure that children are protected and kept safe from harm while they are with staff and volunteers in this organisation. We do this by _____

- giving parents, children and workers information about what we do and what you expect from us
- making sure that our staff and volunteers are carefully selected, trained and supervised
- letting parents and children know how to voice their concerns or complain if there is anything they are not happy about"

PLEASE NOTE:

Any Policy Statements must be in accordance with Children First.

Good Recruitment Procedures

In developing safe procedures for recruitment and selection of staff and volunteers you should:

- List tasks that the staff or volunteers need to perform, and the skills needed for those tasks (this forms the job/role description).
- Give some thought to the kind of person most suited to the post.
- Make all vacancies openly available to interested applicants.
- Advertise the posts, paid and unpaid, as widely as possible, through the most appropriate means for your organisation.
- Ask all applicants to supply information in writing. This should include personal details, past and current work/volunteering experience and any qualifications or skills relevant to the post. It should also include a declaration relating to past criminal records.
- Ask for documentation to confirm the identity of the applicant, such as a long birth certificate. A Driving Licence or Passport with applicants' details together with signature and photograph may also be requested so as to ensure that the applicant is not assuming a false identity.
- Ask for written references – this is important. These may be followed up with a telephone call, if appropriate.
- Meet with all applicants. Explore information contained in the application form and check out attitudes. Meeting with applicants does not always need to be a formal interview, but may be done through an individual discussion with the person in charge.

All recommendations for appointment should be ratified by your organisation's committee. The decision to appoint staff or volunteers is the responsibility of an organisation, and not of any one individual within it.

No matter how good the recruitment and selection procedures may be, they are not foolproof. Good practice in management and supervision of staff and volunteers after appointment is equally important.

Developing safe practices in a group or organisation

These practices will help keep your organisation and its members safe:

Know the children

- Have defined criteria for membership of the organisation,
- Have a registration system for each child
- Keep a record on each child, including medical details, any special needs and emergency contact telephone numbers.

Keep records of

- Attendance
- Accidents – keep an incident book (accident records should be reviewed regularly and any unusual patterns reported to senior management)
- Consents given for various activities
- Any complaints or grievances

Know the workers

- Follow thorough recruitment and selection procedures
- Have a work schedule displayed so that everyone knows who is on duty
- Respond to any allegations or complaints made about workers
- Make sure there are always sufficient workers of either sex to supervise activities

Pay attention to health and safety matters making sure that

- Any buildings being used are safe and meet required standards
- There is sufficient heating and ventilation
- Toilets, shower areas and washing facilities are up to standard
- Fire precautions are in place
- First aid facilities and equipment are adequate
- There is access to a phone
- Equipment is checked regularly
- Insurance cover is adequate

It is important to ensure that

- Children are not normally left unattended;
- Adequate numbers of workers of both sexes are available to supervise the activities
- Workers know at all times where children are and what they are doing
- Any activity using potentially dangerous equipment has constant adult supervision
- Dangerous behaviour is not allowed

If the activities involve staying away from home overnight, attention should also be paid to the following

- Safe methods of transport
- Adequate insurance, to cover all aspects of the trip.
- Written parental consent
- Any information about the children which may be relevant to staying away overnight, like allergies, medical problems, or special needs
- Appropriate and well supervised sleeping arrangements
- Respect for the privacy of children and young people in dormitories, changing rooms, showers and toilets.

Discipline and challenging behaviour

Workers need to be trained and prepared for coping with disruptive behaviour. It is recommended that:

- More than one worker is present when challenging behaviour is being dealt with
- A record is kept in a report book, describing what happened, the circumstances, who was involved, any injury to a person or to property and how the situation was resolved.

Providing training, including

- Induction training
- Particular skills training, to fit in with the nature of the organisation
- Child protection training, to raise awareness and provide information about how to respond to suspicions or incidents of child abuse.

Supervising workers

- Focus on the work to be done, always acknowledging the positive tasks that have already been carried out
- Provide opportunities for discussing concerns and training needs
- Hold a review at the end of the trial period to confirm the workers in post to extend his/her probation period or to determine his/her services.
- Have an annual review or 'staff appraisal' to assess general performance and review any changes that have happened or that you need to make.

Some Frequently Asked Questions about Child Abuse

WHAT IS CHILD ABUSE?

Child abuse is complicated and can take different forms, but usually consists of one or more of the following:

Neglect: Where a child's needs for food, warmth, shelter, nurturance and safety are not provided, to the extent that the child suffers significant harm

Emotional abuse: Where a child's needs for affection, approval and security are not being met and have not been met for some time by their parent or carer

Physical abuse: where a child is assaulted or injured in some way that is deliberate

Sexual abuse: Where a child is used for the sexual gratification of an adult.

WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I SUSPECT THAT A CHILD IS BEING ABUSED?

It can be difficult to know whether or not your suspicions about child abuse are real. Before you act on them, you need to consider whether any alternative explanation might exist and ask yourself these questions:

- Is there any other reason why the child or parent might be behaving in a particular way?
- Is there a pattern to this type of occurrence?
- Did you or anyone else see what was happening?
- Has the child said anything to indicate that he or she is being harmed?
- Could injuries or signs have been caused another way?

If you have considered these questions and you are still concerned, it is likely that you have reasonable grounds to take some action.

WHAT ACTION SHOULD I TAKE?

Every organisation that provides services to children should have somebody who is responsible for dealing with suspected or actual child abuse. You should go to that person, or if there is no designated person, go to the manager and tell them of your suspicions. If they are reluctant to take it further, and you still feel concerned, you should report it to your local health board yourself. If it is an emergency and outside health board hours, you should report your concern directly to An Garda Síochána.

Under the law, you cannot be penalised for reporting suspected child abuse to the health board or An Garda Síochána as long as your report is made in good faith and is not malicious.

WHAT IF I AM MISTAKEN?

Don't worry – if in doubt talk to the social worker anyway, and they will decide whether or not your suspicion needs to be followed up. Under the law, nobody will be penalised for making a report of child abuse to the health board or An Garda Síochána as long as the report is not malicious and made in good faith.

CAN I REPORT SUSPECTED OR ACTUAL CHILD ABUSE WITHOUT GIVING MY NAME?

All reports will receive attention. However, experience shows that it is much harder to help children when reports are made anonymously, or through a third party. It is much more useful if you telephone, or better still, go to see the social worker personally. The health board will not normally reveal the names of members of the public who report suspected child abuse unless they have permission to do so. The health board social worker will know the right questions to ask. You should give as much information as you can about the child and their family, along with detailed reasons for your suspicion or concern. If a professional, e.g. a GP, hospital or clinic staff member, or teacher is reporting suspected or actual child abuse, they should tell the family so beforehand, unless doing so would put the child in danger.

WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I SUSPECT THAT SOMEONE I AM WORKING WITH IS ABUSING CHILDREN IN THEIR CARE?

Follow the advice offered in the earlier question dealing with action to take if you suspect child abuse.

WHAT WILL THE HEALTH BOARD SOCIAL WORKER DO WITH THE INFORMATION I GIVE THEM?

The health board social worker will consider your information and will assess the situation. If they feel it needs to be followed up they may look for more information from other sources and may contact the child and their parent/s. They will try to establish what is going on, and will act to protect the child in whatever way is necessary.

WILL THE GARDAÍ BE TOLD?

Physical abuse, sexual abuse and willful neglect are crimes and must be reported by the health board to An Garda Síochána. Likewise, An Garda Síochána must report any child abuse that comes to their attention to the health board. The Gardaí and the health board will work together as sensitively as possible and take any action necessary to protect the child, or any other children from future harm.

WILL THE CHILD BE TAKEN AWAY FROM THEIR PARENTS?

Very, very few children are removed from their parents because of child abuse. It is much more likely that the health board, together with other services who work with children, will try to help the children and families, and attempt to prevent the abuse happening again. They will provide advice, counselling, family support and practical help wherever they can. Children and parents are separated only as a last resort when other measures to help them have failed.

WHERE CAN I GET MORE INFORMATION ABOUT CHILD ABUSE?

You can get a free summary of the national child protection guidelines from your local health board. A full edition of the guidelines, entitled '*Children First: National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children*' may be purchased from the Government Publications Office at Molesworth St., Dublin 2. Your health board will have information about local procedures and services, which are aimed at promoting the safety and welfare of children

Role and responsibility of a Designated Officer

This factsheet describes the role of a Designated Officer/person within a voluntary organisation or community organisation.

General

Every organisation should designate a person or persons to be responsible for dealing with any concerns about the protection of children.

- The Organisation's child protection policy and procedures should include the name of this person, his role and responsibilities and how he can be contacted.
- The person designated should ensure that he is knowledgeable about child protection and that he undertakes any training, considered necessary, to keep himself updated on new developments.

Role

The role of the designated person is to:

- Establish contact with the senior member of Community Services responsible for child protection in the organisation's catchment area, i.e. Child Care Manager or Principal Social Worker;
- Provide information and advice on child protection within the organisation;
- Ensure that the organisation's child protection policy and procedures are followed and, particularly, to inform Community Services of relevant concerns about individual children;
- Ensure appropriate information is available at the time of referral and that the referral is confirmed in writing, under confidential cover;
- Liaise with Community Services/An Garda Síochána and other agencies as appropriate;
- Keep relevant people within the organisation, particularly the head or leader of the organisation,
- Ensure that an individual case record is maintained of the action taken by the organisation, the liaison with other agencies and the outcome;
- Advise the organisation of child protection training needs.

Responsibility

The designated person is responsible for acting as

- a source of advice on child protection matters,
- for co-ordinating action within the organisation, and
- for liaising with Health Board and An Garda Síochána and other agencies about suspected or actual cases of child abuse.