



**Our Lady of Good Counsel Parish  
Johnstown/Killiney**

# **SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN POLICY**

**March 2011**



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## **INTRODUCTION**

We in the Parish of Our Lady of Good Counsel Johnstown/Killiney value and encourage the participation of children and young people in parish liturgies and in activities that enhance their spiritual, physical, emotional and social development. We recognize the dignity and rights of all children and are committed to their protection and support.

In keeping with this we will work to do all in our power to create safe environments for children and young people in order to secure their protection and enable their full participation in the life of the Church.

## THE PRINCIPLES UNDERLYING OUR DOCUMENT

The Principles are derived from:

- Gospel Values
- International Law
- Domestic Legislation

These Principles include the following:

### **The principles derived from Gospel values are:**

- Each child shall be cherished and affirmed as a gift from God with an inherent right to dignity of life and bodily integrity which shall be respected, nurtured and protected by all.
- Everyone in the Church has an obligation to ensure that the fundamental rights of children are respected.
- A child's right to safety and care is inalienable.
- Children have a right to an environment free from abuse or neglect.
- Children have a fundamental right to justice and freedom; they have a right to be listened to and to be heard.
- Children have a right to good role models whom they can fully trust, who will respect them and nurture their spiritual, physical and emotional development.
- Those who have suffered child abuse by Church personnel should receive a compassionate and just response and should be offered appropriate pastoral care as they seek to rebuild their lives.

### **The principles derived from civil sources are:**

- All adults have a duty to report allegations or suspicions of child abuse, where reasonable grounds for concern exist, irrespective of the status of the person suspected or their relationship to them or to the child.
- Due regard must be given to the criminal dimension of any action.

- It is the statutory duty of the civil authorities, not individuals or organisations, to investigate reports of child abuse.
- A proper balance must be maintained between protecting children and respecting the needs and rights of carers and adults. However, where there is a conflict, the welfare of the child must be paramount.
- Actions taken to protect a child should not in themselves be abusive or cause the child unnecessary distress. Every action and procedure should consider the overall needs of the child.
- Organisations have a corporate responsibility to operate effective systems to assure the protection of children. They should ensure best practice in relation to recruitment and selection processes, provide appropriate training and ensure that all personnel are aware of their responsibility both to prevent child abuse and to report concerns about child abuse.
- All agencies and disciplines concerned with the protection and welfare of children must work cooperatively in the best interests of children.

## DEFINITION OF CHILD ABUSE

The rationale behind drawing up a Policy for the Parish is based on best practice as outlined in Church and Statutory Guidelines. With this in mind, perhaps it is helpful at this point to define what is meant by child abuse

### Definition of Child Abuse

Child abuse occurs when the behaviour of someone in a position of greater power than a child or young person abuses that power and causes harm to that child or young person. Child abuse, for our purposes, is categorised into four groups:

1. Emotional abuse
2. Physical Abuse
3. Sexual Abuse
4. Neglect

### Emotional abuse:

Emotional abuse is the persistent emotional ill-treatment of a child such as to cause severe and persistent adverse effects on the child's emotional development. Emotional abuse is sometimes found in the relationship between a care-giver and child.

### Physical abuse:

Physical abuse is any form of non-accidental injury or injury which results from wilful or neglectful failure to protect a child; e.g. shaking a child, excessive force.

### Sexual abuse:

Sexual abuse occurs where a child is used by another person for his or her gratification for sexual arousal or for that of others.

Indirect abuse of children occurs where children have been photographed, videotaped or filmed for pornographic purposes or subjected to gross and obscene language or indecent images.

### **Definition of Neglect:**

Neglect can be defined in terms of an omission, where the child suffers significant harm or impairment of development by being deprived of food, clothing, warmth, hygiene, intellectual stimulation, supervision and safety, attachment to and affection from adults, and medical care.

Neglect generally becomes apparent in different ways over a period of time rather than at one specific point. It is the persistent failure to meet a child's physical, emotional and/or psychological needs that is likely to result in significant harm.

Examples of neglect include:

- Where a child suffers a series of minor injuries as a result of not being properly supervised or protected.
- The consistent failure of a child to gain weight or height may indicate that they are being deprived of adequate nutrition
- Where a child consistently misses school, this may be due to bullying or deprivation of intellectual stimulation and support.

When developing structures to safeguard children in our Parish, sensitive cognisance is taken of children with special vulnerabilities who may need additional support.

## CHILD SAFEGUARDING REPRESENTATIVES

As part of our policy the Parish has nominated two Child Safeguarding Representatives in accordance with SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN: STANDARDS AND GUIDANCE FOR THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN IRELAND.

### **The responsibilities of the Safeguarding Children Representatives are:**

- To promote awareness of the Church's safeguarding children policies.
- To ensure that the public has ready access to contact details for the Director of the Office for Safeguarding and Child Protection.
- To facilitate anyone in the parish in bringing an allegation or suspicion of child abuse to the attention of the Director of the Safeguarding and Child Protection Service, should they wish to have such support.
- The Parish Safeguarding Children Representatives have been appointed by the parish after appropriate consultation and agreement with the diocese. The persons appointed are expected to have the personal qualities, interest and life experience fitting to the tasks involved. The current Representatives are not paid employees and are lay people. They have been given a role specification, were required to undergo training and have been able to draw on expert help and support from the Director of the Safeguarding and Child Protection Service.
- The Safeguarding Children Representatives will be given every assistance by the Parish Pastoral Council in carrying out their tasks.
- The Safeguarding Children Representatives do not deal with the reported child abuse themselves, but refer it to the designated person within the diocese, i.e. the Director of the Safeguarding and Child Protection Service.

## MAKING INFORMATION AVAILABLE

To assist the reporting of safeguarding children concerns, the contact details of the *Diocesan Designated Person, the H.S.E. and the Gardaí* have been made widely available at parish level. They are, for example, displayed in clearly visible and accessible places, such as the entrance to the Church and in other relevant community buildings.

The contact details for the Parish Safeguarding Children Representatives have also been made available.

Each volunteer worker, together with the priests and the Parish Pastoral Council, will be given a copy of the Policy document and asked to read it to ensure that everyone knows the Parish Policy on Safeguarding Children.

We recommend that all groups operating in a church setting, including visiting groups, be made aware of the policies and procedures for safeguarding children in operation in the parish and shall be asked to confirm that they will implement these policies and procedures. Responsibility for ensuring that our Policy has the agreement of such groups falls on the sub-group of the Parish Pastoral Council under whose care they fall.

## BEST PRACTICE AND CODE OF BEHAVIOUR WHEN WORKING WITH CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

### Code of Good Practice

A customised Code of Good Practice for working with children should be drawn up by all organisations or groups within the Church. The aim of this is to ensure the safety of children and young people, to enhance the work practices of Church personnel, and to reassure parents and guardians, as well as children themselves, that there is a commitment to best practice.

The Code should include positive child-centred statements about the importance of:

- Listening to children and young people;
- Valuing and respecting them as individuals;
- Rewarding their efforts as well as achievements;
- Involving them in decision making (where appropriate);
- Encouraging and praising them.

### General Conduct

- Physical punishment of children is not permissible under any circumstances.
- Verbal abuse of children or telling jokes of a sexual nature in the presence of children can never be acceptable. Great care should be taken if it is necessary to have a conversation regarding sexual matters with a child or young person.
- Being alone with a child or young person may not always be wise or appropriate practice. If a situation arises where it is necessary to be alone with a child, another responsible adult should be informed immediately, by telephone if necessary. A diary note that the meeting with the young person took place, including the reasons for it, should be made.
- Best practice in relation to travel with children and young people should be observed. Personnel should not undertake any car or minibus journey alone with a child or young person. If, in certain circumstances, only one adult is available, there should be a minimum of two children or young people present for the entire journey. In the event of an emergency, where it is necessary to make a journey alone with a child, a

record of this should be made and the child's parent or guardian should be informed as soon as possible.

- Children and young people should not be permitted to work or remain in churches, parish property or schools unless there are at least two adults present.
- All children and young people must be treated with equal respect; favouritism is not acceptable.
- Personnel should not engage in or tolerate any behaviour – verbal, psychological or physical – that could be construed as bullying or abusive.
- A disproportionate amount of time should not be spent with any particular child or group of children.
- Under no circumstances should Church personnel give alcohol, tobacco or drugs to children or young people.
- Alcohol, tobacco or drugs must not be used by personnel who are supervising or working with children or young people.
- Only age-appropriate language, material on media products (such as camera phones, internet, video) and activities should be used when working with children and young people. Sexually explicit or pornographic material is never acceptable.

### **Respect for Physical Integrity**

- The physical integrity of children and young people must be respected at all times.
- Personnel must not engage in inappropriate physical contact of any kind – including rough physical play, physical reprimand and horseplay (tickling, wrestling). This should not prevent appropriate contact in situations where it is necessary to ensure the safety and well-being of a child (for example, where a child is distressed).

### **Respect for Privacy**

- The right to privacy of children and young people must be respected at all times.
- Particular care regarding privacy must be taken when young people are in locations such as changing areas, swimming pools, showers and toilets.
- Photographs of children or young people must never be taken while they are in changing areas (for example, in a locker room or bathing facility).

- Tasks of a personal nature (for example, helping with toileting, washing or changing clothing) should not be carried out for children or young people if they can undertake these tasks themselves.

### **Meetings with Children and Young People**

- If the pastoral care of a child or young person necessitates meeting alone with them, such meetings should not be held in an isolated environment. The times and designated locations for meetings should allow for transparency and accountability (for example, be held in rooms with a clear glass panel or window, in buildings where other people are present, and with the door of the room left open).
- Both the length and number of meetings should be limited.
- Parents or guardians should be informed that the meeting(s) took place, except in circumstances where to do so might place the child in danger.
- Visits to the home or private living quarters of Church personnel should not be encouraged, nor should meetings be conducted in such locations.
- When the need for a visit to the home of a child or young person arises, professional boundaries must be observed at all times.

### **Children with Special Needs or Disabilities**

- Children with special needs or disability may depend on adults more than other children for their care and safety, and so sensitivity and clear communication are particularly important.
- Where it is necessary to carry out tasks of a personal nature for a child with special needs, this should be done with the full understanding and consent of parents or guardians.
- In carrying out such personal care tasks, sensitivity must be shown to the child and the tasks should be undertaken with the utmost discretion.
- Any care task of a personal nature which a child or young person can do for themselves should not be undertaken by a worker.
- In an emergency situation where this type of help is required, parents should be fully informed as soon as is reasonably possible.

### **Vulnerable Children and Adults**

- Since especially vulnerable children may depend on adults more than other children for their care and safety, sensitivity and clear communication are of utmost importance.
- Church workers should be aware that vulnerable children may be more likely than other children to be bullied or subjected to other forms of abuse, and may also be less clear about physical and emotional boundaries.
- It is particularly important that vulnerable children should be carefully listened to, in recognition of the fact that they may have difficulty in expressing their concerns and in order that the importance of what they say is not underestimated.

### **Trips away from Home**

- All trips, including day trips, overnight stays, pilgrimages and holidays, need careful advance planning, including adequate provision for safety in regard to transport, facilities, activities and emergencies. Adequate insurance should be in place.
- Written consent by a parent or guardian specifically for each trip and related activities must be obtained well in advance.
- A copy of the itinerary and contact telephone numbers should be made available to parents and guardians.
- There must be adequate, gender-appropriate, supervision for boys and girls.
- Arrangements and procedures must be put in place to ensure that rules and appropriate boundaries are maintained in the relaxed environment of trips away.
- Particular attention should be given to ensuring that the privacy of young people is respected when they are away on trips.
- The provision of appropriate and adequate sleeping arrangements should be ensured in advance of the trip.
- Sleeping areas for boys and girls should be separate and supervised by two adults of the same sex as the group being supervised.
- At least two adults should be present in dormitories in which children or young people are sleeping. Under no circumstances should an adult share a bedroom with a young person.
- If, in an emergency situation, an adult considers it necessary to be in a children's dormitory or bedroom without another adult being present they should (a) immediately inform another adult in a position of responsibility and (b) make a diary note of the circumstances.

## BEST PRACTICE PROCEDURES

In order to implement the Parish Policy the parish will put the following procedures in place:

### 1. Parental Consent

A signed consent form should be obtained from parents or guardians prior to the participation of children and young people in events, activities and groups.

Parents or guardians should be asked to indicate if the children have any specific dietary requirements, medical needs or special needs.

### 2. Record Keeping

- An accurate record should be kept for each child and young person participating in activities, including, but not limited to, attendance, programme details and medical information. This record should include a copy of the consent form or letter signed by the parent or guardian. It should also contain details of emergency contact numbers.
- A written record of organisers, supervisors, employees and volunteers in attendance at events, such as meetings, choir rehearsals and sports activities, should be kept.
- An Incident/Accident Report Form should be completed in the event of an accident or incident relating to a child.

### 3. Use of Computers

- Every Church organisation should have a clear policy in place regarding the use of email and the internet:
- Where a computer is used by more than one person, each person should be obliged to have a unique username and password, or where this is not possible, to maintain a signed record of the date, time and duration of their use of the computer.
- Where a computer in a Church organisation or institution can be accessed by children or young people, it should be accessible only through the use of a username and password unique to each child. Where this is not possible, the children or young people should be obliged to provide a signed record of the date, time and duration of their use of the computer.

- Computers which can be accessed by children or young people should always have appropriate filtering software.
- All computers in Church organisations and institutions should be monitored regularly to ensure that they are being used in accordance with the stated policy. Where there is any suspicion or doubt, a person with specialist knowledge of computer hardware and software should be asked to assess the purposes for which the computer has been used.
- Care should be taken to ensure that children engaged in church-related activities that involve the use of digital and online systems such as the internet, mobile phones and email do so only in ways that are safe. In particular, group leaders need to ensure that children are not exposed to (a) inappropriate or harmful material, (b) to risk of online grooming by paedophile adults, (c) to online or phone bullying or (d) to their contact details or personal images being insecure or used without consent.

#### **4. Use of Images**

If images of Children (photographs or film) are used in any way by parish organisations, care should be taken that parents and children consent to their use and that this is recorded; that the content of the images is appropriate; that any material published on the internet avoids the use of the children's full names and addresses; that one to one photo sessions with children are supervised; that parents are made aware of the use that will be made of the images.

#### **5. Complaints Procedure**

Any concerns which parishioners may have regarding child abuse should be brought to the attention of the HSE. If the concerns involve church activities the matter should also be brought to the attention of the Director of the Diocesan Office of Safeguarding and Child Protection. If a crime is suspected it should be reported to the Gardaí as well. In all such circumstances people should act without delay. A list of relevant contact numbers is appended to this document.

## RECRUITMENT & TRAINING OF VOLUNTEERS

### General Principles

‘Safe practice starts with safe recruitment procedures’. Most people who apply to work with children and young people in the Church are well-motivated and potentially suitable for the various tasks involved. It is most important, however, that all reasonable steps are taken to ensure that this is, in fact, the case. As well as enhancing the prospects of identifying the best person for the post, rigorous recruitment procedures can act as a deterrent to unsuitable applicants.

Some of the principles which enhance the safety of recruitment include:

- Always applying thorough selection procedures regardless of who the applicant is and whether the position is full-time, part-time, permanent, paid or voluntary.
- Judging the suitability of applicants across a broad range of criteria, through interview.
- Ensuring that interviews are conducted by more than one person and that at least one of those interviewing has established competence in interviewing and selection for posts involving work with children.
- Taking all reasonable steps to exclude unsuitable candidates by insisting on and verifying references, qualification and previous records of employment.

### Key issues in recruitment processes

The safety of recruitment processes can also be enhanced by ensuring that due attention is paid to the following key issues.

- **CLEAR DEFINITION OF ROLE**
- **WRITTEN APPLICATION FORM**
- **INTERVIEWS**
- **DECLARATION FORM**
- **REFERENCES**
- **GARDA VETTING**

## AUDIT AND REVISION

The Office for Safeguarding and Child Protection of the Dublin Archdiocese conducts an annual audit of best practice in the area of Safeguarding Children. In addition the Safeguarding Children sub-committee of the Parish Pastoral Council will itself conduct an annual audit of the compliance with and implementation of this policy in our parish. The text of the policy will be reviewed every three years or more frequently, if necessary, in the light of the experience of its operation.

**IMPORTANT CONTACT DETAILS**

**Andrew Fagan**  
**Director of Dublin Archdiocese**  
**Safeguarding and Child Protection Office**  
**Telephone: (01) 8360314**  
**Email: [andrew.fagan@dublindiocese.ie](mailto:andrew.fagan@dublindiocese.ie)**

**An Garda Síochána, Cabinteely**  
**Telephone: (01) 6665400**

**Health Services Executive**  
**Duty Social Worker**  
**Our Lady's Clinic**  
**Patrick Street**  
**Dún Laoghaire**  
**Telephone: (01) 2804043**

**Joan Curran & Brendan Flanagan**  
**Parish Safeguarding Children Representatives**  
**Our Lady of Good Counsel Parish Office**  
**Telephone: (01) 2351416**





