

# Recognising, Responding and Reporting (Children)

Dealing with concerns about the welfare of a child or suspected abuse

## Introduction

All staff and volunteers of Christ City Church are strongly encouraged to discuss any general concerns they may have about children that they are working with; they may discuss these with their manager and/or the Designated Liaison Person at any time.

All workers should make themselves familiar with the definitions, signs and symptoms of abuse as defined in *Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children*; the relevant sections have been provided in appendices 1 and 2. These will assist the worker in understanding what constitutes abuse and offer guidance on how to recognise it.

It is vital that all such concerns are dealt with sensitively and shared only on a 'need to know' basis.

## Our Responsibilities under *Children First*

As an organisation providing supervised activities for children, Christ City Church recognises its responsibility to provide them with the highest possible standard of care, to ensure and promote their wellbeing and safeguard them from abuse. The *Children First* guidelines outline several key responsibilities in this regard.

All staff and volunteers must be alert to the possibility that children with whom they are in contact may be suffering from abuse or neglect. The Child and Family Agency (Tusla) should always be informed where there are reasonable grounds for concern that a child may have been, is being, or is at risk of being abused or neglected. These concerns should be supported by evidence that indicates the possibility of abuse or neglect.

A concern about a potential risk to children posed by a specific person, even if the children cannot be identified, should also be communicated to the Child and Family Agency.

The safety and well-being of the child must **always** take priority, and any reports that are to be made to the Child and Family Agency must be made without delay.

Christ City Church has appointed a Designated Liaison Person to act as a point of contact regarding any child protection and welfare concerns, and to make sure that they are reported (where necessary) in a timely fashion.

Any reasonable concern or suspicion of abuse or neglect must elicit a response. Ignoring the signals or failing to intervene may result in ongoing or further harm to the child.

## Criminal Justice Act 2006

Section 176 of the Criminal Justice Act 2006 introduced the criminal charge of 'reckless endangerment of children'. It states:

*A person, having authority or control over a child or abuser, who intentionally or recklessly endangers a child by –*

*(a) causing or permitting any child to be placed or left in a situation which creates a substantial risk to the child of being a victim of serious harm or sexual abuse, or*

*(b) failing to take reasonable steps to protect a child from such a risk while knowing that the child is in such a situation, is guilty of an offence.*

The penalty for a person found guilty of this offence is a fine (no upper limit) and/or imprisonment for a term not exceeding 10 years.

## Recognising Concerns

A concern could come to the attention of a worker in several ways:

- A child tells (or indicates to) a worker that he/she is being abused. This is known as a disclosure – the *Child Protection and Welfare Practice Handbook* provides guidelines for responding to a child in this situation and is included in appendix 3. All staff and volunteers should be familiar with these guidelines.
- An admission or indication from the alleged abuser
- A concern about a potential risk to children posed by a specific person, even if the children are unidentifiable
- Information from someone who saw the child being abused
- Evidence of an injury or behaviour that is consistent with abuse and unlikely to be caused in any other way
- Consistent indication over a period that a child is suffering from emotional or physical neglect
- An injury or behaviour which is consistent with abuse, but an innocent explanation is given
- Concern about the behaviour or practice of another volunteer or staff member

## Procedures for Responding to a Child Protection or Welfare Concern

Any child protection or welfare concern should be reported to the Designated Liaison Person; a written record will be made and kept centrally. Even if they do not constitute reasonable grounds for concern, they may be used to support or inform future concerns.

If a disclosure has been made by a child, the worker who received the disclosure should make a written statement as soon as possible, making sure to keep it concise and factual. It should be signed and dated, and given to the Designated Liaison Person.

If there are reasonable grounds for concern (as per the *Child Protection and Welfare Practice Handbook* – see below) the Designated Liaison Person will complete a Standard Report Form without delay and send it to the Duty Social Work Team in the Child and Family Agency (Tusla).

Where the concern is urgent and the child is in immediate danger, the report to the Child and Family Agency will be made by telephone and followed up with the completed Standard Report Form.

Under no circumstances should a child be left in a situation that exposes him or her to harm or risk pending intervention by the Child and Family Agency. In the event of an emergency where a Duty Social Worker is not available, the Designated Liaison Person will contact An Garda Síochána.

### Informal Consultation

The Designated Liaison Person may use the process of informal consultation with the Duty Social Work Team to discuss the response to a child protection and welfare concern and whether it warrants reasonable grounds for concern. Informal consultation is carried out without providing the name of the family or the child. If advised to do so, a formal report will be made.

The Designated Liaison Person will record information about the concern, informal consultation (if carried out) and details regarding if (and when) the parents of the child were informed.



### Procedure when a referral is not made

Not all concerns will meet the reasonable grounds for concern. In this case, the concern and any informal consultation will be documented and kept confidentially and securely.

The staff member or volunteer who raised the original concern will be informed, in writing, by the Designated Liaison Person, that no formal referral is being made, and the reasoning behind this decision. The individual will be advised that they may make a report themselves or contact the Duty Social Work Team at the Child and Family Agency (Tusla) directly. The *Protection for Persons Reporting Child Abuse Act (1998)* makes provisions for those making a report in this manner, which is designed to protect them from being prosecuted provided the report is made reasonably, and in good faith.

### Informing Parents

When a child protection concern is being reported to the Child and Family Agency (Tusla), it is good practice that the parents be informed about the report, unless doing so would place the child at further risk.

The Designated Liaison Person may seek advice from the Child and Family Agency in relation to this.

### Reasonable Grounds for a Concern

The *Child Protection and Welfare Practice Handbook (HSE, 2011, p30)* sets out the following guidance:

*What constitutes reasonable grounds for a child protection or welfare concern?*

- *An injury or behaviour that is consistent both with abuse and an innocent explanation, but where there are corroborative indicators supporting the concern that it may be a case of abuse.*
- *Consistent indication over a period of time that a child is suffering from emotional or physical neglect.*
- *Admission or indication by someone of an alleged abuse.*
- *A specific indication from a child that he or she was abused.*
- *An account from a person who saw the child being abused.*
- *Evidence (e.g. injury or behaviour) that is consistent with abuse and unlikely to have been caused in any other way.*

### Responding to a Retrospective Disclosure of Child Abuse by an Adult

An increasing number of adults are disclosing abuse that took place during their childhoods. Such disclosures often come to light when adults attend counselling. **It is essential to establish whether there is any current risk to any child who may be in contact with the alleged abuser revealed in such disclosures.**

If a staff member or volunteer becomes aware of a retrospective concern, they should follow the normal reporting procedures above, and speak to the Designated Liaison Person. If any risk is deemed to exist to a child who may be in contact with an alleged abuser (or if there is any doubt), even if the child cannot be identified, the concern should be reported to the Child and Family Agency (Tusla) without delay.

It is important that the adult remain supported throughout, and information about relevant services may be provided.

*The HSE National Counselling Service (NCS) is a professional, confidential counselling and psychotherapy service available free of charge in all regions of the country.*

[http://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/4/Mental\\_Health\\_Services/National\\_Counselling\\_Service/](http://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/4/Mental_Health_Services/National_Counselling_Service/)

## Document History

Version	Author(s)	Date Revised	Comments/Changes
1.0	Caroline Anderson	22/09/2015	Initial version
2.0	Stephen Sharpe Leanne Vaughan (reviewer)	20/05/2017	New proposed redraft based on <i>Children First</i> and <i>Developing a Child Protection and Welfare Policy</i>