



**RELIGIOUS
SISTERS
OF CHARITY**
The love of Christ urges us on

IRISH PROVINCE

CHILD SAFEGUARDING PROCEDURES

Child Safeguarding Procedures

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Religious Sisters of Charity

Child Safeguarding Procedures

Foreword

As Religious Sisters of Charity we are committed to serve the poorest people in our society. Our ministry includes work with children in various forms.

In all of our work with children we recognise and promote the fundamental right of every child to a safe environment in which she or he will be free from any form of abuse, neglect or harm. It is therefore our policy to protect any children with whom we work from physical, emotional, sexual abuse, neglect or harm and to strive to provide a safe and caring environment for them.

In order to ensure that this happens these procedures are provided to each person **working with the Religious Sisters of Charity in any area involving children.**

Our work with children falls broadly into two categories.

- 1.1 Work in education, health, social service facilities and Parishes. All of these have their own policies/guidelines e.g. schools, health centres, counselling associations, breakfast clubs, and day care centres, churches etc.

Persons involved in such work, whether voluntary or paid, are obliged by and accountable to the organisation concerned. The organisation is in turn accountable to the appropriate governmental body (e.g. Department of Education & Skills, the Child & Family Agency) and is obliged to provide its own internal child safeguarding policies and procedures in accordance with Children First National Guidance (2011). Persons working for other Church bodies e.g. within parishes, will be governed by the Diocesan procedures and the One-Church policy “Safeguarding Children Policy & Standards for the Catholic Church in Ireland 2016”.

Any person involved in such work is obliged to seek the internal written child protection policies, procedures and guidelines in existence within the relevant organisation/body. In the event that no such guidelines exist, any person involved in such work should immediately discuss the matter with a member of the Provincial Leadership Team and seek further guidance in relation to their position.

Each person working in a situation covered by No 1.1 above must be aware of and be familiar with the processes of child safeguarding and reporting of allegations which they are obliged to follow when working with such organisations.

- 1.2 Work which takes place outside of any of the above settings, e.g. activities organised by the Religious Sisters of Charity directly for children in clubs or other groups, teaching English to children at the request of a parent, preparing a child for a Sacrament, etc.

For persons working in any of these settings the policy of child safeguarding “Safeguarding Children Policy & Standards for the Catholic Church in Ireland 2016” and the operational procedures as set out in this current Religious Sisters of Charity document must be adhered to in all situations. Any queries arising from this document should be directed to the Child Safeguarding Delegate, or any member of the Provincial Leadership Team.

Instructions on the Use of this Document

In 2016, the National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church in Ireland (NBSCCCI) replaced “Safeguarding Children Standards & Guidance” (2009) with “Safeguarding Children Policy and Standards for the Catholic Church in Ireland 2016”. After extensive consultation with Dioceses and Religious Congregations and Orders, the “Safeguarding Children Policy and Standards for the Catholic Church in Ireland 2016” was adopted as a One-Church policy.

The Religious Sisters of Charity signed a memorandum of understanding with the NBSCCCI agreeing to adopt and implement “Safeguarding Children 2016”.

The development of a One-Church policy necessitated a review of the Religious Sisters of Charity “Safeguarding Children & Vulnerable Adults” policy and procedures. The current document is the outcome of this review.

Outcome:

- Our child safeguarding policy is “Safeguarding Children Policy and Standards for the Catholic Church in Ireland 2016”. This can be accessed on our website (www.religioussistersofcharity.ie) and on the NBSCCCI website (www.safeguarding.ie).
- Operational procedures to accompany the policy are outlined in this document “Religious Sisters of Charity Safeguarding Children Procedures 2016”.



This document offers guidance and procedures under each of seven standards:

- Standard 1- Creating and Maintaining Safe Environments
- Standard 2- Procedures for Responding to Child Protection Suspicions, Concerns, Allegations or Knowledge
- Standard 3- Care and Support for the Complainant
- Standard 4- Care and Management of the Respondent
- Standard 5- Training and Support for Keeping Children Safe

- Standard 6- Communicating the Church’s Safeguarding Message
- Standard 7- Quality Assuring Compliance with the Standards

Where there is a reference to www.safeguarding.ie within the document, further guidance or a template can be found on that website. To locate the guidance, click on the coloured logo on the home page of that website. This will open links to guidance for each of the seven standards. If the reference in the document reads “www.safeguarding.ie 1.8A”, you would go to Standard 1 Guidance and then find 1.8A.

Some additional documents are contained in the Appendix section of this document:

Appendix 1: Definitions and Signs of Child Abuse

Appendix 2: Child protection referral form

Appendix 3: Contact details for support services

Child Safeguarding Policy Statement of the Constituent Members of the Catholic Church in Ireland

As a constituent member of the Catholic Church in Ireland, we recognise and uphold the dignity and rights of all children, are committed to ensuring their safety and well-being, and will work in partnership with parents/guardians to do this. We recognise each child as a gift from God, and we value and encourage the participation of children in all activities that enhance their spiritual, physical, emotional, intellectual and social development. All Church personnel (including clergy, religious, staff and volunteers) have a responsibility to safeguard children through promoting their welfare, health and development in a safe and caring environment that supports their best interests and prevents abuse.

**Details of Personnel to Contact if you are Concerned about
the Welfare and Safety of Children**

DLP: Rita Wynne, Religious Sisters of Charity
Provincial House, Our Lady's Mount Harold's Cross,
Dublin D6W W934 Tel: 01 4973177

Catherina Kenny Religious Sisters of Charity,
Provincial House Our Lady's Mount, Harold's Cross, Dublin
D6W W934 Tel: 01 4973177

An Garda Síochána Harcourt Square,
Dublin 2 DH42 Tel: 01 666 3777

This confidential Freephone line Number is 1800 555 222
for the reporting of child sexual abuse it will be manned on a
24 hour basis 7 days a week, 365 days a year.

CHILD PROTECTION SERVICE: Ms Cora Kelly
Tusla
2nd Floor Units, 4/5 Nexus
Building,
Blanchardstown Corporate
Park, Ballycoolin, Dublin 15
Tel: 01 8976888

**This safeguarding statement is displayed in a prominent location
at all Religious Sisters of Charity facilities.**

Roles in the Safeguarding Structure

Provincial

To be responsible for all safeguarding practices by:

- Ensuring that the appropriate child safeguarding structures and personnel are in place;
- Ensuring compliance with canon and civil law.

Designated liaison person (DLP)

To promote safeguarding by:

- Hearing child safeguarding concerns;
- Passing on child safeguarding concerns to the statutory authorities;
- Managing cases and all associated documents;
- Liaising with the support person, advisor and the Provincial;
- Passing on child safeguarding concerns to the NBSCCCI;
- Conducting internal inquiries;
- Contributing to upholding the seven standards in practice and behaviour;
- Completing an annual report regarding compliance with Standards 2, 3 and 4 for the Provincial;
- Monitoring respondents or, with the Provincial, appointing a suitable person to carry out this role.

Advisory panel

To promote safeguarding by:

- Advising the Provincial on all stages of the investigative process into alleged child abuse;
- Keeping a record of all of its recommendations;
- Upholding the seven standards in practice and behaviour.

Support person

To promote safeguarding by:

- Keeping the complainant informed of the process of the case;
- Helping to direct the complainant to counselling and support;
- Recording any meetings or contact they have with the complainant, and Reporting to the DLP as appropriate;
- Upholding the seven standards in practice and behaviour.

Advisor

To promote safeguarding by:

- Keeping the respondent informed of the process of the case;
- Helping direct the respondent to counselling and support;
- Recording any meetings or contact they have with the respondent, and Reporting to the DLP as appropriate;

- Upholding the seven standards in practice and behaviour.

Safeguarding committee

To promote child safeguarding by:

- Developing a three-year child safeguarding plan;
- Coordinating activities related to child safeguarding, e.g. training;
- Ensuring the annual audit, including the correlation of records for training-related activities;
- Ensuring the completion of assessments of training needs across the various child safeguarding roles in the Church body;
- Ensuring, with the Provincial, that the appropriate child safeguarding personnel are in place;
- Upholding the seven standards in practice and behaviour.

Standard 1: Creating & Maintaining Safe Environments

1. General policy

As Religious Sisters of Charity we recognise and respect the rights and dignity of every child. Our standards of behaviour and our relationships with children must always reflect this and must therefore include a firm commitment to providing a safe, caring and life giving environment in which children can feel secure, respected and happy.

In order to ensure this, each person working with children must observe the following:

- Safe Recruitment of Staff
- Code of Behaviour for adults working with children
- Code of Behaviour for children
- Procedures for organising activities in a safe manner for children

1.1 Safe Recruitment

The Religious Sisters of Charity (referred to as “the Charity”) acknowledges that safe care starts with the appointment of suitably qualified, skilled and vetted personnel who have the desired competencies and skills to carry out their function in an effective, efficient and safe manner. Whoever is recruited by the Charity and whose work may involve contact with children, either in a pastoral or voluntary role, must be recruited safely and deemed suitable for the role that they are being asked to undertake.

Safe recruitment means that the Charity will ensure that:

- All reasonable steps are taken to ensure that the Charity eliminates applicants who might pose a risk to children;
- Those engaged in the recruitment process are suitably trained and experienced to undertake this task;
- The Charity’s recruitment procedures are transparent, adhere to best practice and comply with the rules of natural justice, appropriate record-keeping and human resource management;
- The Charity is committed to the policy of inclusion and equality;

Safe recruitment procedures:

- An application form should be used
- Interview
- Completion of a declaration form stating there is no reason why they would be considered unsuitable for working with minors (www.safeguarding.ie 1.1A Template 3)
- Positive identification check, in compliance with requirements of National Vetting Bureau Act
- Garda vetting & police clearance where applicable
- Reference checks

Volunteers: Safe recruitment procedures should also be used when recruiting volunteers to work with children. Formal interview and reference checks may not be necessary.

Once appointed, the following elements should be in place:

- Induction: Ensure that the member of personnel is inducted into the Religious Sisters of Charity's safeguarding policy and that they agree to follow the policy and procedures by signing an agreement form
- Ensure the probationary period is served, where applicable
- Ensure professional support, supervision and appraisals are offered as appropriate
- Ensure that safeguarding training is provided and attended

Note on Garda Vetting – It is mandatory that any person, who becomes involved in any group/organisation working with minors or in the setting up of any such group/organisation, should in the first instance contact the DLP for guidance in order to ensure that appropriate Garda vetting procedures are fully adhered to.

Since April 2016, the National Vetting Bureau Act provides a statutory basis for the vetting of persons carrying out work with children and vulnerable adults. It is a criminal offence to allow

anyone to engage in ministry with children or vulnerable adults, without having them vetted first.

1.2 **Codes of Behaviour for adults working with children**

It is important for all personnel to:

- Treat all children with respect and dignity;
- Treat all children equally;
- Model positive, appropriate behaviour to all children we come into contact with;
- Be aware of the Religious Sisters of Charity's child protection and safeguarding policy;
- Challenge and report abusive and potentially abusive behaviour;
- Develop a culture of openness, honesty and safety;
- Develop a culture where children have permission to tell and to talk about any concerns or worries that they may have;
- Respect each child's boundaries and support them to develop their own understanding and sense of their rights;
- Be aware of their responsibility for the safety of all children in their care;
- Work in open environments;
- Help children to know what they can do if they have a problem.

Adults must never:

- Hit or otherwise physically assault or abuse children;
- Develop sexual relationships with children;
- Develop relationships with children that could in any way be deemed exploitative or abusive;
- Act in any way that may be abusive or may place a child at risk of abuse;
- Use language, make suggestions or offer advice that is inappropriate, offensive or abusive;
- Do things for a child of a personal nature that they can do themselves;

- Condone or participate in behaviour that is illegal, unsafe or abusive;
- Act in any way that is intended to intimidate, shame, humiliate, belittle or degrade;
- Engage in discriminatory behaviour or language in relation to race, culture, age, gender,
- disability, religion, sexual orientation or political views;
- Consume alcohol, tobacco or illegal drugs while having responsibility for or in the presence of children/young people.

In general, it is inappropriate to:

- Take children away or to your own home, especially where they will be alone with you;
- Involve children in one-to-one contact; activities should usually be supervised by at least two adults. However, there may be two circumstances where this may occur:

I. In a reactive situation, for example when a young person requests a one-to-one meeting with you without warning, or where a young person has had to be removed from a group as part of a code of behaviour;

II. As part of a planned structured piece of work (for example one-to-one music tuition).

1.3 Code of Behaviour for Children

Children should be involved in drawing up a code of behaviour for themselves. However, it is important that in working with children, an appropriate adult with relevant skills and competencies participates to support them in developing the code of behaviour.

The methods used in creating a code of behaviour should be age and ability appropriate, with children being encouraged to avoid merely drawing up a list of prohibitions. Instead, the code should be comprised of positive statements about respect, and should consider what consequences ensue if the code is broken.

In developing the code, consideration should be given to the following:

- Treating everyone with respect;
- Treating property with respect;
- Not consuming alcohol, tobacco or illegal drugs;
- Agreeing not to bring any physical item into the Church activity that may cause offence or harm to others;
- Acting as a good role model;
- Attending activities on time;
- Signing in and out;
- Turning off your mobile phone;
- Telling someone you trust if you feel uncomfortable with any situation or individual;
- Not using bad language when communicating by phone or email;
- Never bullying anyone or sending threatening messages. (www.safeguarding.ie 1.3C offers “Guidance on Anti-Bullying”)

1.4 Organising activities in a safe manner for children

If Religious Sisters of Charity are to create a safe environment in which children can participate and develop well, activities need to be planned, they should be child centred in their practice and behaviour, and there should be clear procedures to guide practice.

The majority of ministries involving children undertaken by members of the Religious Sisters of Charity are under the auspices of another organisation e.g. Department of Education/school, Diocese.

Where a member works with children for another organisation, it is expected that she is well acquainted with and adheres to that organisation’s safeguarding policy and procedures.

Organising safe activities for children will involve:

- Completing a hazard assessment; This assists with managing both health and safety issues, and the general welfare of children.

Guidance and a template for completing a hazard assessment (www.safeguarding.ie 1.8A)

- Having clear guidance on children with specific needs (www.safeguarding.ie 1.4F)
- Having a clear procedure for taking children on trips away and pilgrimage (www.safeguarding.ie 1.4G)
- Seeking 'Child & Guardian Consent' as appropriate (www.safeguarding.ie Template 1.4A)
- Register of attendance: A minimum of two officially appointed leaders should be responsible for each activity involving young people. At least one of the leaders must have undergone a full day training session provided by trainers registered with the NBSCCCI. These leaders must sign an attendance sheet and put their initials under each date to confirm that the children/young people and adults marked were in attendance, as indicated by the 'time in' and 'time out' for each date.
- Supervision ratios: Considering how many adults are needed to supervise a specific group of children and being mindful of gender balance. (www.safeguarding.ie 1.4C & D) offers guidance on supervision ratios and one-to-one contact.
- Guidance on accidents (www.safeguarding.ie 1.4B)
- Guidance on the use of technology, photographs and videos (www.safeguarding.ie 1.9)

1.5 Guidance on external groups working with children that use Religious Sisters of Charity property

In circumstances where groups working with children are using or hiring Religious Sisters of Charity property for this purpose,

it is necessary to check that they have a child safeguarding policy and that they are insured. There is no requirement for the Religious Sisters of Charity to oversee the activities or to check that their safeguarding policy is adequate. It is the responsibility of the group using the property to check with Tusla that their policy meets statutory requirements.

The Religious Sisters of Charity should have confirmation in writing that the group has a child safeguarding policy and details of their insurance policy.

A template for receiving this information is set out on (www.safeguarding.ie 1.5A Template 1.)

1.6 Whistle-Blowing policy

All Religious Sisters of Charity members, staff and volunteers must acknowledge their individual responsibility to bring matters of concern to the attention of their supervisor/superior/Provincial/manager or manager for another agency.

Although this can be difficult to do, it is particularly important where the welfare of children may be at risk.

You may be the first to recognise that something is wrong, but you may not feel able to express your concerns out of a feeling that this would be disloyal to colleagues, or you may fear harassment or victimisation.

These feelings, however natural, **must never result in a child or young person continuing to be unnecessarily at risk.** Remember, it is often the most vulnerable children or young people who are targeted. These children need an advocate to safeguard their welfare.

Don't think, 'what if I'm wrong?' Think, 'what if I'm right!'

Reasons for whistle-blowing

- Each individual has a responsibility to raise concerns about unacceptable practice or behaviour.
- To prevent the problem worsening or widening.

- To protect or reduce risks to others.
- To prevent yourself from becoming implicated.

What stops people from whistle-blowing

- Fear of starting a chain of events that spirals out of control.
- Disrupting the work or project.
- Fear of getting it wrong.
- Fear of repercussions or damaging careers.
- Fear of not being believed.

How to raise a concern

Whistle-blowing can be about a range of concerns, not just safeguarding.

It is important to:

- Voice any concerns, suspicions or uneasiness as soon as possible. The earlier a concern is expressed the sooner and easier action can be taken;
- Try to pinpoint exactly what practice is concerning and why;
- Approach your immediate superior/supervisor/manager;
- If your concern is about your immediate superior/supervisor/manager, please contact your DLP, the statutory services or the NBSCCCI;
- Make sure a satisfactory response is secured – don't let matters rest.

- Ideally, concerns should be placed in writing, outlining the background and history, giving names, dates, locations and any other relevant information.
- You are not expected to prove the truth of your complaint, but you need to demonstrate sufficient grounds for concern.

What happens next?

- You should be given information on the nature and progress of any enquiries resulting from your concern.
- Your supervisor/superior/manager has a responsibility to protect you from harassment or victimisation.
- No action will be taken against you if the concern proves to be unfounded and was raised in good faith.
- Malicious allegations will be considered a disciplinary offence.
- Follow up if the person to whom you reported has not responded within a reasonable period of time, and if that follow up is not acted upon, report the matter to the relevant statutory authorities.

Self-reporting

There may be occasions when a member of staff or a volunteer has a personal difficulty, perhaps a physical or mental health problem, which they know to be impinging on their professional competence. Staff and volunteers have a responsibility to discuss such a situation with their line supervisor/superior/manager so that professional and personal support can be offered to the member concerned. Whilst reporting will remain confidential, in most instances this cannot be guaranteed where personal difficulties raise concerns about the welfare or safety of children.

1.7 Complaint procedure for safeguarding concerns that are not allegations of abuse

A complaint is defined as a grievance and/or the raising of a concern about breaches of codes of behaviour. Allegations or suspicions of child abuse do not fall into this category of general complaints, and should always be dealt with in accordance with guidance above at Standard 2. This complaints procedure is not for use by Church personnel who would use the whistle-blowing procedure to raise their complaint.

All complaints will be taken seriously and dealt with fairly and confidentially. Efforts will be made to quickly and informally resolve complaints through discussion with the parents, children/young people, volunteers/members of staff and clergy, as appropriate.

A copy of a complaints form is available at (www.safeguarding.ie Guidance 1.7A Template 1)

If a parent/guardian, young person or child is not satisfied with any aspect of the running of a particular activity, or the behaviour of any individual involved in that activity, the following steps should be taken:

First step

All complaints of this nature should be resolved using an open dialogue with the Religious Sisters of Charity personnel involved. If resolution is not possible, the following step should be taken.

Second step

1. The Local Leader (or is it local superior?) should be contacted by completing a complaints form (Guidance 1.7A Template 1). The Local Leader has eight weeks to consider the complaint.

2. A letter acknowledging receipt of the complaint will be sent within seven calendar days, enclosing a copy of the complaints procedure.

3. All complaints will be thoroughly investigated.

4. The Local Leader or her Delegate may organise a meeting to discuss and hopefully resolve the complaint. This communication

may also take place by telephone if a meeting is not possible. Unless exceptional circumstances pertain, this will be done within fourteen calendar days of sending the acknowledgement letter to the complainant.

5. Within seven days of the meeting or discussion, the Local Leader or Delegate will write to the complainant to confirm what took place and to set out any solutions that were agreed upon.

6. If a meeting is not agreeable or possible, the Local Leader or Delegate will issue a detailed written reply to the complainant, setting out their suggestions for resolving the matter within twenty-one calendar days of sending the acknowledgement letter to them.

7. If the complainant is still not satisfied at this point, they should contact the Local Leader again.

At the conclusion of this step, the Local Leader may decide to take further action on the complaint. If, however, the Local Leader decides not to take further action, the process is completed.

Standard 2: Procedures to Child Protection Concerns, Allegations, Suspicions & Knowledge

2. Introduction

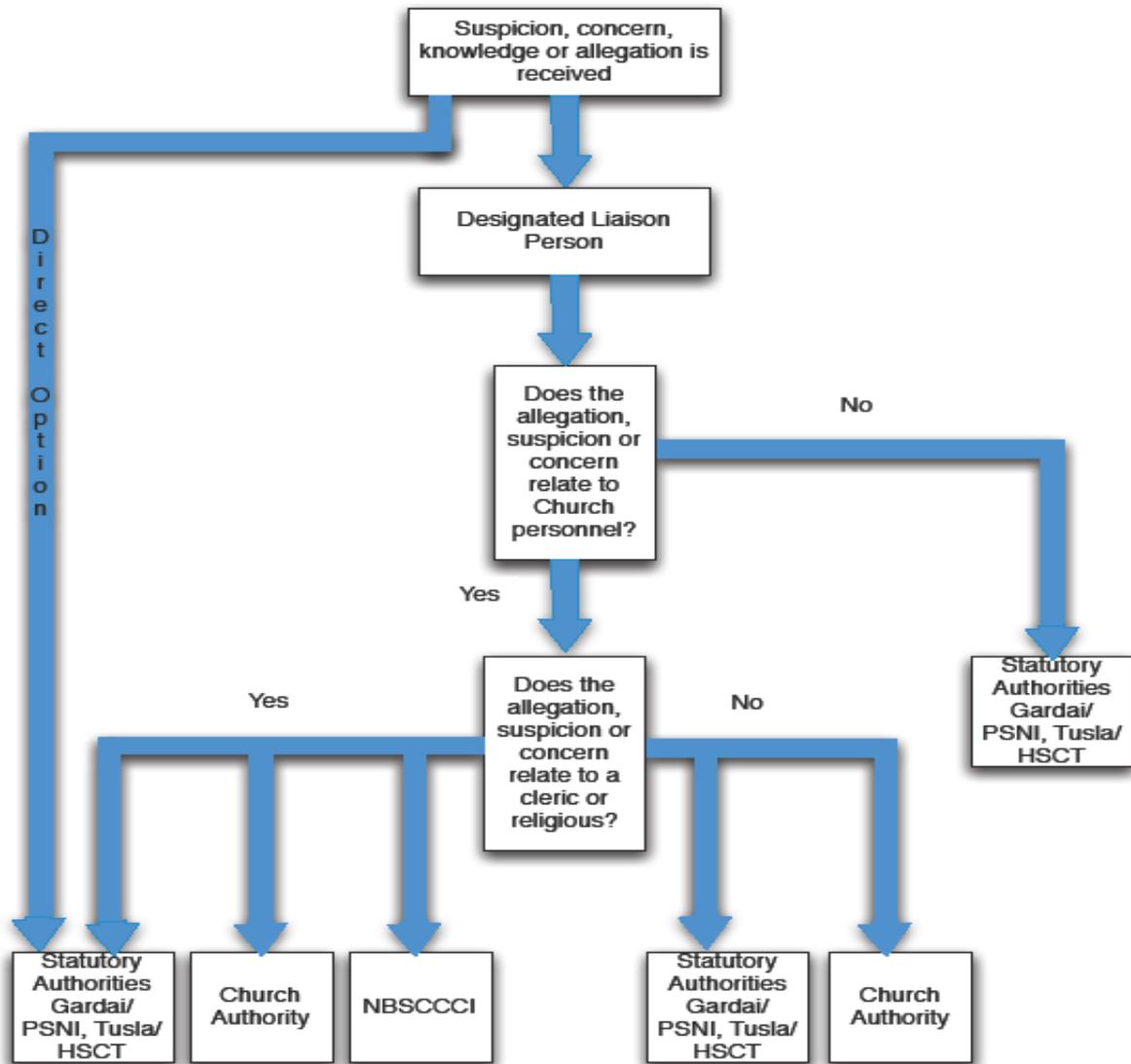
Children occupy a central place in the heart of the Christian community. They have a right to be listened to and be heard. The paramount consideration in all matters relating to children is their safety and protection from all forms of abuse. To create and maintain a safe environment, the Religious Sisters of Charity must respond effectively to all allegations of abuse. The responsibility to report allegations of abuse to the statutory authorities (An Garda Síochána & Tusla) is mandatory.

It is important that anyone working on behalf of the Religious Sisters of Charity is clear on how to respond to allegations. This includes who to tell and how to record the information. This section of the policy provides guidance on these issues. Should any person be unsure of whether information they have received constitutes an allegation of abuse or if they want guidance on how they should manage a concern, they should contact the Designated Liaison Person (DLP).

Contact details for the DLP are on page x on the Child Safeguarding Statement.

2.1 Procedure for reporting an allegation of child abuse & Flowchart

The reporting flow chart below refers to any child protection concern, including where the concern is about a situation or person involved with the Charity. It is the responsibility of everyone in the Charity to ensure that children who may need help and protection are not left at risk of abuse.



Following receipt of an allegation, suspicion or concern, the following steps should be taken.

1. Act immediately on receipt of a suspicion, concern, disclosure or allegation of abuse, and refer the matter to the DLP without delay.

2. If the allegation does not relate to Religious Sisters of Charity personnel, the DLP will refer the allegation to:

- Tusla
- An Garda Síochána

3. If the allegation relates to Religious Sisters of Charity personnel who are not RSC members, the DLP will refer the allegation to:

- Tusla
- An Garda Síochána
- The Provincial

4. If the allegation relates to Religious Sisters of Charity members, the DLP will refer the allegation to:

- Tusla
- An Garda Síochána
- The Provincial
- The NBSCCCI

5. If there is any uncertainty about whether the allegation/concern meets the threshold for reporting, a consultation should take place by the DLP with the statutory authorities, who will advise on the requirements for notification.

2.2 Guidance for Receiving and Recording an Allegation

1. Whenever possible and practical, take notes during the conversation. Always ask permission to do this and explain the importance of recording all information. Where it is not appropriate to take notes at the time, make a written record as soon as possible afterwards or before the end of the day. Record the time, date, location, persons present and how the allegation was received, e.g. by telephone, face-to-face conversation, letter, etc. This initial recorded information will be transferred to a child protection referral form (Appendix x) and will become the first entry in a file of information about the case that will be retained by the DLP. Please always sign and date the record.
2. The record would also normally include:
 - Accurate identifying information of the complainant, as far as it is known. This should include the name, address and age of the complainant when the alleged abuse occurred;

- Where the person who has raised a concern/allegation is a child, details of parents/ guardians should also be given;
- Name of the individual against whom the concern/allegation is being raised, and any other identifying information;
- Dates when the concern arose, or when the incident occurred;
- The person's own words they used to describe the event or incident. Do not make assumptions about the intended meaning of the words used;
- Details of any action already taken about the incident/concern/allegation;
- Do not be selective. Include details that to you may seem irrelevant. This may prove invaluable at a later stage in an investigation. All original records, including rough notes, should be passed immediately to the relevant DLP. Any copies of retained records should be kept secure and confidential.

3. Remember – it is not your role to investigate.

4. In cases of emergency (and/or outside normal business hours), where a child appears to be at immediate and serious risk, an urgent report must be made to Tusla, as well as to the DLP. Where the appropriate Tusla staff are not available, An Garda Síochána must be contacted to ensure that under no circumstances a child is left in a dangerous situation pending Social Services intervention (see direct option in Figure x).
5. In all cases, consideration should also be given as to whether an immediate referral is necessary in order to preserve and safeguard against the possibility of any loss, deterioration or destruction of forensic or other potential evidence (see direct option arrow in Figure x).
6. Explain to the person raising the concern what will happen next. You should inform the person making the suspicion, concern or allegation that their identity and the identity of the respondent and complainant will be shared with the statutory authorities. Leave

contact details of the DLP if the referrer needs to ask questions later.

The incident/concern should not be shared with anyone other than those who need to know, apart from the statutory authorities and appropriate Church authorities detailed in these procedures.

7. Written confirmation should be given to the person making the referral to the DLP that the information has been passed on to the statutory authorities. If this has not happened, an explanation should be recorded (this will not be possible when dealing with anonymous allegations).

The appropriateness of the response given to a complainant is vital to ensure that they feel heard and taken seriously.

2.2a Responding to a person making an allegation of abuse

Where a child, young person or adult, discloses child abuse to a person working in any capacity in the Religious Sisters of Charity, it is crucially important that the situation is handled sensitively and compassionately. It should be borne in mind that the person may feel that they have taken a huge risk in disclosing the abuse. Our response will help a person to disclose as much as they can remember, which will help any future investigation.

People may tell you about:

- Abuse that happened to them;
- Something they've been told by someone else and that they strongly believe is true;
- Seeing signs of abuse, such as physical injuries on a child;
- Something they have witnessed that makes them feel uncomfortable.

Extra care needs to be taken if the person disclosing they were abused is a child. See guidance note on responding to children making allegations at the end of this section.

Where information is given in person, consider the following:

- Adopt a listening style that is compassionate, calm and reassuring. If the information given to you shocks, disgusts or distresses you, do not allow these feelings to show. If you do, you may inadvertently dissuade the person from giving any further information;
- Listen carefully to that person, but do not ask intrusive or leading questions;
- Stay calm, take what the person raising the concern says seriously, and reassure them;
- Allow the person to continue at their own pace;
- Check with the person to make sure that you have understood what they actually said. Do not suggest words – use theirs;
- Make no promises that cannot be kept, particularly in relation to confidentiality, but listen carefully to what is being sought in this regard;
- Explain the referral procedures to the person;
- Offer the services of a support person, if the support person is not present;
- Do not make any comments about the respondent; do not make assumptions or speculate;
- Be aware that a person's ability to recount their concern or allegation will depend on their age, culture, nationality or any disability that may affect speech or language;
- Avoid statements about your reaction to the information given;
- Do not question beyond checking what has been said. It is the responsibility of Tusla and An Garda Síochána to investigate.

There should be no probing for detail beyond that which has been freely given;

- Do not offer wording or language to the person making the allegation that may assist in the provision of an account of the concern or allegation.

2.2b Guidance on responding to children disclosing abuse

- If a child tells you directly about abuse happening to them, you should allow them to speak and listen attentively. However it is not appropriate to set up a meeting with a child for the purpose of receiving a disclosure or taking a statement. That is the role of Tusla.
- While it is assumed that it is difficult for all people to disclose abuse, the person receiving the allegation should be conscious that a child may feel very frightened and need reassurance and support that they have done the right thing in disclosing the abuse.
- The DLP will consult with Tusla about informing the child's parents/guardians. It is best practice to inform parents/guardians unless doing so would place the child at further risk.
- If the allegation is about Religious Sisters of Charity personnel, explain to the child and their parents that the information will be reported to the statutory authorities and Church authorities.
- All offers of further support to the child should be conveyed via the child's parents or an appropriate adult.

2.3 Guidance on Responding to an Anonymous Allegation of Abuse

Anonymous complaints are to be handled carefully. Anxiety and fear may persuade some people not to immediately reveal their identity. It is sometimes difficult to act on information under these circumstances, unless at some point the name of the person raising the concern or making an allegation becomes known.

If you are unsure whether or not the information you have received reaches the threshold for reporting, consultation with the statutory

authorities may be appropriate. The person raising the concern should be informed that anonymity might restrict the ability of professionals to access information or to intervene to protect a child. As much openness as possible should be encouraged.

However, if you receive any identifiable information that relates to an allegation of abuse (current or past), you must pass this information onto the appropriate statutory authorities so that an investigation can be undertaken to assess child protection risks.

2.4 Guidance on Responding to Somebody admitting to abusing a child

It is necessary to tell a person who admits an offence against a child or young person that such information cannot be kept confidential. If such an admission is made to you, even where the admission relates to something that happened a long time ago, you must refer the matter to the DLP as soon as possible. The DLP will follow the procedures for referral to Tusla and An Garda Síochána.

Standard 3: Care and Support of the Complainant

Those who have alleged child abuse should receive a compassionate response from the Religious Sisters of Charity and be offered access to appropriate care, advice and support. Complainants need to be listened to and heard to ensure that any allegation or disclosure of abuse is handled compassionately, effectively and professionally.

Disclosing abuse takes enormous courage and calls for a high level of trust. Child abuse by its very nature can damage trust; it is therefore imperative that when a complainant is ready to tell their story, the listener responds with great sensitivity and compassion. The Religious Sisters of Charity leadership and safeguarding personnel will engage in ongoing reflection to identify who is best placed to offer pastoral care to complainants, and recognise that providing pastoral care may not be the sole responsibility of any one person. Pastoral care may be offered and provided by the DLP managing the case, the support person if taken up by the complainant, the Provincial at an appropriate time, or indeed another identified representative if there is something specific they can offer.

How will we try to ensure that complainants are supported?

- Once an allegation has been received, the DLP will try to arrange a face to face meeting with the complainant, in a manner that respects the wishes of the person;
- The complainant may be accompanied by a person of their choice to the meeting;
- Every complainant is offered access to a support person. The role of the support person is to ensure that the complainant is appropriately supported throughout the process of disclosure and thereafter. It is the prerogative of the complainant whether or not they wish to accept the assistance of a support person;
- The complainant will be provided with details of support services and assisted in making an appointment if required;
- The Religious Sisters of Charity makes a commitment to funding such professional support, as appropriate;
- If the threshold for reporting has been reached, the DLP will help the complainant to understand the necessity to refer the matter to the statutory authorities;
- At an appropriate time in the process, the complainant will be invited to meet with the Provincial or another representative of the Religious Sisters of Charity if this is their desire. This meeting is not for the purpose of determining the outcome of any investigations, but for the Provincial to hear and acknowledge the experience of the complainant;
- At the end of this meeting, the support needs can be reviewed. Some complainants may wish to remain engaged with their Church despite the effect that the abuse may have had on their relationship with it, and, perhaps, with God. By meeting with and listening to complainants, the response from the Church that might best meet their spiritual needs can be identified with them. Towards Peace may be of assistance in this regard;
- The Religious Sisters of Charity is open to providing independent facilitation or mediation for meetings if this is required.

Standard 4: Care and Management of the Respondent

The Religious Sisters of Charity employ different processes regarding the management of the respondent dependent on the stage the case is at. Care is an important element at every stage as people who have received an allegation against them are recognised as being vulnerable. It is important that there is a fair procedure in regards to the management and investigation of allegations. A proper balance should be struck between protecting children and respecting the rights of respondents. Where there is a conflict, the child's welfare must come first.

Management and care is provided by specific personnel in the safeguarding structure. The DLP has case management responsibility and ensuring that appropriate protective measures have been taken but also that support is offered to the respondent. The role of the adviser is to support the respondent at meetings, direct her to counselling or other professional services, and to keep her informed of the progress of the case. The Provincial and leadership team have responsibility to oversee the case and ensure that the relevant personnel are in place and acting in accordance with their role.

Internal Case Management

- On receipt of an allegation, the priority is to ensure that information that has reached the threshold for reporting is referred to the statutory authorities. The DLP will check with An Garda Síochána if there is any reason as to why the information cannot be shared at that time with the respondent. In rare circumstances, An Garda Síochána will ask the DLP to delay this so as not to hamper an investigation.
- If the threshold for reporting has been reached, a preliminary investigation in accordance with canon law will be initiated by the Provincial (CCEO, c. 14684). This canonical inquiry will be paused to allow any statutory investigation to take place.
- At the earliest opportunity, the Provincial will call a meeting with the respondent and invite her to bring a person for support.
- At the meeting the DLP will share the details of the allegation with the respondent. The respondent will be invited to seek canonical advice and if appropriate, civil legal advice. She will be advised

that she can respond to the allegation if she wishes and this will be recorded and referred to the statutory authorities. However, she does not need to make a response at this stage.

- The Provincial will judge the level of risk in consultation with the statutory authorities, DLP, NCMC, advisory panel and advisor (www.safeguarding.ie Guidance 4.2B). A decision will be made at this stage as to whether an interim management plan is required), which may include restrictions to ministry.
- A written reminder is given to the respondent from the Provincial to advise them to continue following the child safeguarding policies and procedures.
- Full guidance on the internal investigation can be found on www.safeguarding.ie Standard 4 “Guidance on the Process for Non-Ordained Religious, Following the Conclusion of Any Investigation by the Statutory Authorities”.

Support

- While statutory and/or internal investigations are underway, pastoral support is offered to the respondent. It is recognized that this is an especially difficult time for any person and they will be vulnerable. They are provided with an advisor/support person and offered therapeutic support as well as canonical and legal advice.
- If at the end of a preliminary investigation, it is found there is no case to answer It is important that all outstanding matters to allow the person to move forward with their life and ministry.

Therefore, in preparation, the respondent should be provided with counselling and support to assist them to deal with any residual anger/distress. This may include spiritual direction, reflection and discussions with the Provincial or a member of leadership.

- If the allegations are substantiated at the end of the canonical process, the person requires pastoral and therapeutic support and also to help address any offending behaviour.

Standard 5: Training & Support for Keeping Children Safe

The Religious Sisters of Charity see training as the cornerstone in maintaining high standards and good practice. All personnel complete training in child safeguarding. Those in safeguarding roles are offered further training to enhance their effectiveness.

- All members, employees and volunteers have a role to play in child safeguarding particularly if their work brings them into contact with children and young people.
- The Religious Sisters of Charity ensures that all members attend either a safeguarding information session or a full day training, depending on their ministry and retirement status.
- If there were to be staff and volunteers working with children on behalf of the Religious Sisters of Charity, they would be fully inducted and trained in child safeguarding.
- Attendance records and a training audit are maintained.
- Trainers who have been approved by the NBSCCCI currently provide this training for the Religious Sisters of Charity.
- As part of their overall induction, all new employees/volunteers are made aware of the Religious Sisters of Charity Safeguarding Policy and Procedures.
- There is a commitment to ensuring that everyone has the required knowledge and skills to exercise their specific safeguarding function. Funding is provided for training in this regard.
- The DLP is expected to keep updated on issues relating to safeguarding children, by keeping abreast of changes in policy and guidance and attending relevant courses and conferences.
- A function of the DLP's role is to be available to all members, employees and volunteers for advice, guidance and support. The DLP builds her network of professional services so that advice and specific information can be accessed.

Standard 6: Communicating the Church's Safeguarding Message

Having a child safeguarding policy and procedure document is a requirement but in order for the document to be effective, it must be communicated to the relevant people in an appropriate way. The DLPs for the Religious Sisters of Charity and the leadership team ensure that the message of 'keeping children safe' is communicated to all personnel, the lay faithful and external agencies. Practices are in place to facilitate personnel in having a good working knowledge of the policy and procedures.

These practices include:

- Members and personnel working with children are inducted into the use of the safeguarding policy and procedures;
- All members, employees and volunteers are required to comply with the policy;
- "Safeguarding Children Policy and Standards for the Catholic Church in Ireland 2016" along with the Religious Sisters of Charity Safeguarding Procedures are posted on our website www.religioussistersofcharity.ie. Hard copies of the policy and procedures are available.
- Safeguarding training and awareness-raising workshops for all personnel is available;
- The child safeguarding statement including relevant contact details are on prominent and permanent display in Religious Sisters of Charity premises;
- Use is made of the website, newsletters, Provincial pastoral letters etc. to further communicate the safeguarding message;
- The Safeguarding Committee is established to regularly review safeguarding practices and help publicise the message;
- The Religious Sisters of Charity works with the statutory authorities to:
 - 1) Ensure our message is in-line with best practice and legislation.

- 2) Ensure the statutory authorities know what the policy of the Charity is in regard to safeguarding of children and young people.
- 3) Report all allegations and share information as appropriate.

Standard 7: Quality Assuring Compliance with the Standards

Quality assurance procedures are a systematic method of assessing the extent to which the previous six child safeguarding standards are implemented at all levels within the Religious Sisters of Charity. We want to ensure that a process of continuous improvement takes place.

7.1 Safeguarding Committee

The role of the safeguarding committee is to oversee the implementation of Standards 1, 5, 6 and 7.

In relation to Standard 7, the safeguarding committee is responsible for:

- Producing and reviewing the three-year child safeguarding plan of how to maintain the seven standards across the Charity;
- Liaising with the local safeguarding representatives (LSRs) (usually the local superior) to ensure the compilation of a local safeguarding audit, and to identify areas where guidance and support on policy or practice is needed;
- Ensuring that an annual safeguarding report on Standards 1, 5 and 6 is made to the Provincial.

7.2 Safeguarding strategic plan

The safeguarding strategic plan is to assess the effectiveness of the steps being taken to keep children safe. The purpose of this internal child safeguarding plan is to set out what, how, who and in what time frame key elements of child safeguarding practices and procedures are going to be met by the Church body.

The Religious Sisters of Charity safeguarding plan includes the following:

- Specific objectives linked to each of the safeguarding standards. These objectives can be broken down into set actions. A training plan and communications plan is included.

- Resources: It is important to set specific and realistic objectives linked to identified allocated resources.
- Implementation: The Provincial, through the safeguarding committee, should identify clear time frames for implementation, which should take account of the completion of the local safeguarding audits
- Review and evaluation: It is important that the three-year plan sets clear dates for review of each specific objective outlined in the plan. These review dates should be achieved on an annual basis, and reviews should take account of the outcomes of the annual local safeguarding audit.

7.3 Quality Assurance

This is done by applying three methods:

1. Assessing compliance during systematic visits to Religious Sisters of Charity centres or community houses;
2. Annual self-audit scheme carried out locally, but coordinated by the safeguarding committee;
3. External audits by the NBSCCCI and statutory agencies e.g. Tusla

SIGNED:

Sr Phyllis Behan

Ratified by the Provincial Team

February 2017

February 2017