

## **CHILD PROTECTION – POLICY STATEMENT**

We, in the Parish of Wicklow, value and encourage the participation of children and young people in all Parish activities that enhance their spiritual, physical, emotional and social development. We recognise the dignity and rights of all children and are committed to ensuring 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. This Policy will be reviewed annually in January.

### **DEFINITIONS OF CHILD ABUSE**

Child abuse is abuse that occurs to a person under the age of eighteen excluding a person who is or has been married.

There are four primary types of child abuse – **neglect, emotional abuse, physical abuse, and sexual abuse**. A child may be subjected to one or more forms of abuse at a given time:

#### **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. **Supervision and safety mainly apply to our policy.**

#### **Definition of Emotional Abuse:**

Emotional abuse is normally to be found in the relationship between a care-giver and a child rather than in a specific event. It occurs when a child's need for affection, approval, consistency and security is not met.

#### **Definition of Physical Abuse:**

Physical abuse is any form of non-accidental injury or injury which results from wilful or neglectful failure to protect a child.

#### **Definition of Sexual Abuse:**

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

**The above definitions are taken from Children First: National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children. Available from the Department of Health and Children.**

### **What to do when working and dealing with children**

#### **DO:**

- Keep parental/guardian consent forms for all groups.
- Treat everyone with respect.
- By your behaviour, provide a good role model for others working with children.
- Plan activities that involve more than one person being present, or at least which are within sight or hearing of others.
- Respect a young person's right to personal privacy.
- Provide access for young people to talk to others about any concerns they may have.

- Encourage young people and adults to feel comfortable and caring enough to point out attitudes or behaviour they do not like.
- Recognise that caution is required even in sensitive moments of counselling, such as dealing with bullying, bereavement or abuse.
- Remember that someone else might misinterpret your actions, no matter how well intentioned.
- Refer any complaints or allegations to either the parish representative or the diocesan designated person.
- Have an adequate ratio of leaders to young people at all times.
- Ensure there is an adequate ratio of gender appropriate leaders to young people at all times.
- Follow diocesan guidelines for any away trips.

### **What not to do when working and dealing with children**

#### **DO NOT:**

- Jump to conclusions without checking facts.
- Investigate any complaints or allegations on your own. You must follow procedure as described in this policy document.
- Permit abusive peer activities, i.e. initiation ceremonies, ridiculing, bullying.
- Play physical contact games with young people.
- Have any inappropriate physical or verbal contact with others.
- Allow yourself to be drawn into inappropriate attention seeking behaviour such as tantrums or crushes.
- Use bad language, or language with sexual innuendo.
- Exaggerate or trivialise child-abuse issues.
- Show favouritism to any individual.
- Make suggestive remarks or gestures.
- Display photographs on church walls with personal information such as names, addresses, phone numbers, etc.
- **Rely on just your good name to protect you.**
- **Believe “It could never happen to me”.**
- As a leader, work alone with young people.
- Permit young people to consume alcohol or smoke while participating in activities in keeping with civil law in Ireland.
- Allow leaders (18+) to consume alcohol or smoke while having responsibility for, or in the presence of, young people.

### **What to do if a child discloses to you abuse by someone else**

#### **DO:**

- Keep calm.
- Listen carefully.
- Give a clear and simple explanation of what will happen next (as outlined below).
- Reassure the child or young person of your support.
- Reassure the child or young person that they will be kept informed of developments.
- Record, date and sign an account of the meeting with the child or young person as soon as possible, including the time, date and factual details of the meeting.
- Report to the parish representative or to the diocesan designated person to receive complaints or concerns.

## **What not to do if a child discloses to you abuse by someone else**

### **DON'T:**

- Panic.
- Delay.
- Ask leading questions.
- **Promise to keep the disclosure secret.**
- Ask the child or young person to repeat the story unnecessarily.
- Make a judgment about the complaint or disclosure.
- Start an investigation.

## **What to do if you suspect 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 adult 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 the signs or injuries have been caused in some other way?

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

- Consult with the parish representative or the diocesan designated person about the matter.
- Keep a written record of why you have consulted with the parish representative or the diocesan designated person.

## **DIOCESAN BASIC PROCEDURES FOR ANY GROUPS ORGANISED BY A PARISH FOR THE PROTECTION OF CHILDREN**

The Diocese requests that each parish undertakes to have the following in place:

- Signed parental consent for each young person.
- Appropriate supervision ratios of adults to young people while maintaining the practice of ensuring that no young person is left alone with an adult.
- A duty roster of leaders to ensure adequate supervision of young people at all times.
- A code of conduct for all adult leaders and young people.
- Adequate record keeping processes.
- Contact information for parents/guardians.
- Procedures for recruitment and overseeing adult leaders working with young people.

## CONTACT TELEPHONE NUMBERS

**Parish Child Protection Representative (Wicklow):** 087 123 8054

**Diocesan Child Protection Office:** 01-836 0314

**Director of the Safeguarding & Child Protection Service: (Mr. Andrew Fagan)**

01-8842590 (Direct line) mobile 087 6853180

[andrew.fagan@dublindiocese.ie](mailto:andrew.fagan@dublindiocese.ie)

The Director, who is responsible for the overall management and development of the Child Protection Service, will receive all allegations of abuse and ensure that they are dealt with appropriately).

**Health Service Executive:** 0404-68400

**Wicklow Gardaí:** 0404-67107

**Garda Confidential:** Freephone: 1800 666111

**Samaritans Helpline:** Call Save: 1850 609090

**Childline:** Freephone: 1800 666666