



April 2008

Latest edition of Safeguarding Trust —worth the wait... definitely!

Safeguarding Trust will now be available in a loose leaf binder entitled *A Guide for Parish Panels, Select Vestries and Workers*. It will also be placed on the Church of Ireland website where it may be downloaded. It has been approved by the General Synod Standing Committee.

When you open the binder you will find the Church's child protection code presented in a colourfully designed format with 9 separate sections addressing issues from the appointment of voluntary and paid workers, keeping premises and children safe, the recognition of different forms of abuse and how reporting should be handled. The final section is composed of resources ranging from articles for parish newsletters, application forms, guidelines on photography, mobile phones and websites together with a variety of checklists.

The design will mean that you can quickly find the relevant answer to a query or the appropriate guideline or direction as each section is colour coded with a divider which rehearses the section contents.

Safeguarding Trust has been reviewed externally in both jurisdictions to ensure it is in compliance both with appropriate legislation and best practice. The design means that changes arising from State guidelines, legislation or other recommendations may be easily incorporated into the document. Each parish, group or union will be provided with six copies of the Code and additionally copies will be available on request. The individual cost for the document will be €15.

So what's new? Here are some examples:

- ◆ The code directs that where the panel is advised of a child protection issue that the panel should, providing it has formed a reasonable opinion in accordance with the guidelines, convey that report to the duty social worker in the child and family unit in the local HSE (health services authority) child and family centre.
- ◆ The requirements for vetting new applicants who have unsupervised access to children are set out.
- ◆ Guidelines carried in previous newsletters in regard to supervision ratios and the use of new technologies are now included.
- ◆ Application forms have been amended.
- ◆ Provision for a central events panel is advised where a diocese or group like CIYD is holding a central function attended by children from a number of dioceses.
- ◆ The need for a complaints procedure for parents where the complaint is not related to child protection and a grievance procedure for workers is advised.
- ◆ Guidance in relation to children with physical disabilities or having special education needs is provided.
- ◆ Reflecting sad developments in society there are brief notes on trafficking and child prostitution and on the abuse of vulnerable adults.

Details of distribution is enclosed in a separate flyer with this Newsletter and clergy and other panel members must book in to confirm their attendance at the venue and date chosen.

Out and about with the Child Protection Officer

Renée English writes...

Since commencing work last September I have been out and about meeting people and learning how Safeguarding Trust is being implemented throughout the Republic. Training is a priority as child protection is largely about prevention. Setting up good practice will help to protect children and avoid abuse or allegations against workers.

I have made contacts in each diocese at this stage and look forward to working with them in the future. It is early days but I have made some initial observations.



The Safeguarding Trust seminar is currently based on material prepared by Canon John Mc Cullagh, supported by a power point presentation. It is delivered in an evening session with time for questions and answers.



It will be beneficial to extend the training available for panel members and youth leaders. The Volunteer Development Agency (NI) recommends that a basic nine hours training should be the standard for those charged with implementing child protection policies. This policy has been adopted by the Health Services Executive in its provision of training for voluntary bodies.



In order to support the implementation of the code diocesan support teams were set up to provide training to panel members and youth leaders. In some dioceses the training is provided by a single trainer. This can prove difficult in widely dispersed areas where considerable travel is involved. Trainers could also benefit from the support of colleagues in making presentations. It would be desirable to increase the pool of potential trainers.

I paid a visit to the Raphoe diocesan support team in January in Letterkenny. They are fortunate to have a team of six who provide both training and parish evaluations. Evaluations provide an opportunity to review issues such as general safety/welfare, implementation of procedures and training requirements in respect of youth ministry. This is an excellent model and is replicated in some dioceses.

I have also attended a parish evaluation in Longford recently, providing a valuable insight into the challenges of running youth activities in scattered parishes.

Information for those running training and for clergy and lay people who have queries in relation to Safeguarding Trust is now channelled through me and you are welcome to contact me at Church House. Telephone: 01 4125662.

A nine hour course in child protection for youth workers, co-facilitated by Suzie Evans of Youth for Christ is planned for a group including paid youth workers. This course is delivered under the auspices of the Volunteer Development agency and the Health Service Executive.

I have also been involved with the staff of the Board of Education and our Northern Ireland colleagues in revising the code. This has been a painstaking process involving many drafts but at last it is ready for release.

I look forward to meeting more people when we 'go on tour' shortly, giving briefings and distributing the new improved material.

Communicating with young people

The following is an extract from Safeguarding Trust and has caused some discussion among youth workers. Please read it carefully and then reflect on the comment below.

It is important to give workers guidelines on what is appropriate in terms of mobile phone and email contact with the children/young people they are working with :-



Anything which compromises the leader's ability to maintain a safe environment and give his/her full attention to the supervision of children, such as using a mobile phone, should be actively discouraged. A blanket ban is not necessary as mobiles may obviously be useful in emergency situations.

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Contacting children and young people by phone, text or email should never be undertaken without parental knowledge or consent.



Leaders should not be emailing children and young people directly as individuals but may do so as part of a disclosed list (having received prior permission to disclose in group email) where they are disseminating information in relation to events. Disclosed lists should be used for sending organisation information via a designated and suitably trained adult (because of his/her position this person should also have been subject to appropriate selection and vetting processes). Group emails should also give individuals the opportunity to have their contact details removed from the list by including a statement such as: "If you wish to be removed from this email list, please contact the administrator".



Leaders should not contact young people through chat rooms and social networking sites such as Bebo, MSN.*

*While government guidelines state that social networking sites should not be used for private communication, we recognise that parishes and youth groups may have a group site on social networking sites such as *Bebo*. In this scenario, the normal protections must apply and the leader/group administrator must set clear guidelines for access and content and act promptly in the event of any misuse. It is not appropriate to communicate with young people through an individual's private site.

The first bullet clearly refers to the answering of a mobile when it might prove a distraction while supervising children or young people's activities while the second is a protection for workers themselves at the same time recognising parental rights and duties.

It would be good practice for employed youth workers to use a designated business phone for all contacts and to eschew the use of one's personal phone. This has the advantage that it limits unnecessary contacts with the worker.

The bullet points above are the guidance provided by the Volunteer Development Agency in Northern Ireland and similar advice is reflected in the article on web safety.

Web Safety



The Minister for Education and Science, Mary Hanafin, T.D has launched a new education programme on internet safety aimed at parents and teachers as well as children. This new initiative focuses on promoting safer and more effective use of social networking websites by children in Ireland and includes:

- ◆ Nationwide Internet Safety seminars for parents
- ◆ Nationwide in-service training for SPHE teachers
- ◆ Classroom resources for use in teaching the SPHE curriculum to first, second, and third years in post-primary schools
- ◆ Nationwide Social Networking workshops for primary and post-primary teachers

Speaking at the launch Minister Hanafin said, "this new initiative will support both parents and schools in assisting our children to develop the new life skills necessary to ensure safe and worthwhile experiences with internet technologies." This new programme has been developed by the National Centre for Technology in Education (NCTE) in partnership with the Social Personal Health Education (SPHE) Curriculum Support Service and the National Parents Council - Primary (NPC).

Minister Hanafin said that the European Commission carried out a widespread public consultation last year regarding how best to address internet safety issues. One of their key recommendations is that - parents and professionals need to acquire a better understanding that children and young people live in a world of ever increasing sophistication of technological means. The findings recommended that measures be taken to close the widening gap between parents, teachers and children in relation to the use of these new technologies and to internet safety awareness and safe practice.

In association with the National Parents Council (NPC-Primary), the Minister announced the national roll-out of Internet safety seminars for parents. These seminars will deal with issues

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such as cyber bullying, the disclosing of personal information and the more effective use of social networking sites.

Speaking about the new SPHE Internet Safety programme, Minister Hanafin said "the internet is a hugely valuable resource for everyone including young people. However, we must ensure young people understand that sources of information put on the world wide web may not always be what they seem. There are also many dangers in providing personal information which can be accessed by people that it was not intended for. Young people using social networking sites need to be aware of and sensitive to their role in influencing the behaviour of others through their online lives."

One NCTE initiative - www.webwise.ie, the Irish Internet safety site, is at the forefront of internet safety education in Europe. Minister Hanafin said "it highlights the personal safety needs of our young people when online and helps them to become safe and responsible internet users for life"



Garda Vetting

The following request is not unknown.

As we have already appointed XY as to the role ofcould you speed up the vetting application for that person?

This implies that XY is already in place and that would be a breach of procedures. It is utterly inadvisable to appoint someone to a voluntary position giving a letter of appointment with a rider to the effect that "in the event of a vetting result being considered unacceptable" your role would be terminated. It is also extremely unwise to appoint someone to a paid position with a similar clause in the contract. A vetting check provides data in respect of convictions and the vast majority of such convictions do not necessarily preclude someone from subsequently working with children. In some cases, you might be very uncomfortable in continuing to employ such a person. Therefore please follow procedures and at best avoid the embarrassment of asking someone to step back from a role and at worst avoid costly employment litigation.

You may have read in newspaper reports that vetting checks take 4 – 7 weeks. In some cases batches have taken 12 weeks so it is essential that forms are complete and ready for processing.



Please follow the key steps below:

- ◆ Check form has been completed fully
- ◆ Check information is legible
- ◆ Complete header form identifying parish / organisation
- ◆ Send forms to authorised signatory in Church House marked Private and Confidential.



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