

Newsletter

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A new season of parish activities with children and young people is underway!

Refer to Safeguarding Trust Part 9 for relevant checklists to ensure their safety and welfare

- Ensure that Safeguarding Trust is on the Select Vestry agenda
- Check safety aspects such as fire drills, evacuation notices, safety hazards on premises
- Has the Common Protocol for use of parish premises by independent organisations been signed by the Secretary of the Select Vestry where appropriate?

Parish Panel

- Schedule a parish panel meeting if one has not taken place recently.
- Review the action plan arising from your parish evaluation and take action on any outstanding issues
- Are ST notices in place and up to date on parish premises?
- Are records for parish workers and activities stored securely with access for panel members?
- Is training required for new panel members or youth workers?



Resources

- Worker's extracts
- Summary cards
- Information Guides for Parents and Guardians

Are additional copies required?

Worker's extracts are available at a cost of €4.00 from the Sunday School Society Resource Centre, Holy Trinity Church, Rathmines, Dublin 6
Tel. 01-4972821.
Website: www.sundayschoolsociety.ie

Worker's Summary Cards and Information Leaflets for Parents/ Guardians are available free from the CPO at Church House.

OUR POLICY

"It is the policy of the Church of Ireland to set standards for the welfare of all children sharing in its ministry with a view to protecting them from physical, sexual and emotional harm."



Children First National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children 2011 – a crash course!

For the first time the Government has created a full cabinet ministry for Children and Youth Affairs.

Minister Ms Frances Fitzgerald has recently launched revised guidance to supercede that first published in 1999 and reviewed in 2009.

The Guidance deals with the recognition, reporting and management of child safety concerns. It states what organisations need to do to keep children safe and what different bodies and the general public should do if they are concerned about a child's safety and welfare.

The principle and substance of the new document (2011) are unchanged.

The Guidance has been updated to reflect new policy, legislation and organisations (HSE, HIQA, DoCYA)*. It incorporates lessons from investigations, reviews and inspections over the past decade.

The Minister intends putting Children First on a legislative basis to ensure, as far as possible, compliance by all organisations, statutory, private, community and voluntary working with children. This includes faith based organisations.

Key messages include:

The safety and welfare of children is everyone's responsibility

The importance of multi-disciplinary, interagency working in the management of concerns about children's safety and welfare

The need to share information between agencies and disciplines in the best interests of children and the need for full co-operation to ensure better outcomes

Definitions of Child Abuse

The document reflects the growing awareness of the impact of ongoing neglect on children; it also includes bullying as a feature of abuse.

The list of what constitutes physical abuse of a child has been expanded to include slapping, observing violence and "allowing or creating a substantial risk of significant harm to a child."

There is express reference to and acknowledgment of the harm caused to children by exposure to domestic violence, which is included in the definition of emotional abuse. Exposure to inappropriate or abusive material through new technology is also included for the first time.

There have been two additions to the signs and symptoms of neglect as follow:

- inattention to basic hygiene and
- failure to provide adequate care for the child's developmental problems.

Responsibilities of Organisations

Every organisation, both public and private, that is providing services for children or that is in regular direct contact with children should:

- 1) *ensure* best practice in the recruitment of workers, which includes Garda vetting, taking up references, good HR practices in interviewing, induction training, probation and ongoing supervision and management.
- 2) *ensure* that workers are aware of how to recognise signs of child abuse or neglect.

Will mandatory reporting be introduced?

The legislation being introduced includes an obligation to report. It is not intended to use the phrase mandatory reporting as this is associated in other countries with professionals simply reporting concerns of any type for reasons other than child protection.

There will only be a very limited number of hard copies of the guidance available.

Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children is available on the websites: www.dcyu.ie and www.hse.ie

* HSE- Health Service Executive,

* HIQA - Health Information and Quality Assurance,

* DoMCA - Department of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs.

National Vetting Bureau Bill 2011

The National Vetting Bureau Bill 2011 was presented by the Minister for Justice, Equality and Defence on 27th July 2011.



In announcing the proposed legislation, Minister Shatter said “The Kelly Fitzgerald Report, The Ferns Report, the Dublin Archdiocesan Report, the Ryan Report and the Cloyne Report have clearly shown the need to strengthen our procedures to protect children and vulnerable adults.”

The National Vetting Bureau Bill 2011 has two main purposes:

1) To provide a statutory framework for the existing vetting procedures, using criminal records information, in regard to:

- (a) persons applying for public sector jobs,
- (b) persons seeking employment working with children and vulnerable adults.

2) To provide a statutory framework to define “soft” or “relevant” information, and to set out procedures to allow this relevant information be used, in addition to records of prosecutions or criminal convictions, in vetting persons applying for employment working with children or vulnerable adults. “Soft” or “relevant” information will be carefully defined. An independent appeals mechanism will be available.

“Soft” information will be used in regard to employment which involves working with or being in regular contact with children or vulnerable adults.

A policy decision has been made not to create a new statutory agency to do the work of vetting, but to use the structure of the existing Garda Vetting Office (the Bureau”)

Decisions on whether or not to employ a person will continue to be made by the employer, not by the Vetting Bureau. The consent of the person seeking employment will be obtained prior to vetting. Both of these provisions exist at present.

It is intended that the Bill in final form will be published by the end of October to be debated in the Dáil in the next session.

The Board of Education has made a submission to the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Vetting regarding the Draft Heads of the National Vetting Bureau Bill 2011.

Mixed Age Group Activities

Enquiries have been made about good safeguarding practice for mixed age activities such as table tennis clubs and choirs, where the group consists of both adults and children. Activities may include travelling to other venues. Should all the adults be recruited safely and Garda vetted?

Care should be taken to ensure that children in mixed-age activities are appropriately supervised. It is not appropriate for adults to be recruited, attend Safeguarding Trust training and to be Garda vetted unless they have specific responsibilities for children. In such groups, it is sensible to have a number of people, perhaps on a rota, within the group, designated to supervise the welfare of the children involved.

Garda Vetting Update:

Currently it is taking approximately 10 weeks for processed forms to be returned to the Board of Education from the GCVU.

Social networking - good practice for youth workers

Social networking sites e.g. 'Facebook', have become increasingly popular for contacting people and advertising events. Users need to be careful about those they accept as 'friends' on sites such as these, as they are essentially designed for peer to peer contact.

Many youth groups use social networking sites to share information and photographs. Young people often initiate these groups and promote them with friends.

If an account is set up in the name of the church or youth group, it is important that an adult leader becomes a member and oversees the content and activity.

Considerations to be aware of:

- Leaders should maintain boundaries between their personal and professional lives by customising their privacy settings and avoiding uploading inappropriate personal information.
- Agreed guidelines on photographs should be followed when uploading images.
- Leaders should monitor conversations, images and behaviour of members of the group and challenge as necessary.

Emails

Considerations when using email to communicate with children and young people

- Make sure the child's parent or guardian know and agree to this method of communication.
- Use clear, appropriate language.
- Where possible have a separate email account for church activity communications.
- Never use terms such as 'love' or kiss ('x') to end the message.
- Never forward chain emails.
- Make sure any image sent is appropriate.
- Make sure any hyperlinks do not lead to inappropriate content.
- Always copy another adult into the emails and save copies sent.

Text Messages

The benefit of sending a text message is the ability to communicate and respond immediately in a given situation. It is important to ensure that the content of the message can not be misinterpreted.



Consideration when using text message to communicate with children and young people:

- Make sure the child's parent or guardian know and agree to this method of communication.
- Where possible use a separate mobile phone from your personal one.
- Only give out to young people contact details that the church has placed in the public domain.
- Use appropriate language.
- Never use kiss ('x') to end a text.
- Always copy another adult into the text message

Unless in an emergency, texting should only be done during the morning to evening times. Late night texting is inappropriate.

Great care must be taken to ensure that any images texted are appropriate.

Adapted from guidelines published by the Anglican Diocese of Bath & Wells

Part 7 of Safeguarding Trust includes guidelines for sharing information.

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