

Nurse on Call's COMMITMENT TO CHILD PROTECTION- Nurse on Call is committed to promoting and facilitating the full participation of children and young people in our work. We aim to create a safe and healthy environment for the young people with whom we work and we are committed at all times to ensuring their safety and welfare. These guidelines are based on "Children First – National Guidance" and "Our Duty to Care – The Principles of Good Practice for the Protection of Children and Young People". In accordance with these documents, it is good practice for all organisations, which have contact with children and young people to introduce a child protection policy. This policy also helps to provide safeguards and support for staff when they are working with children and young people.

2. STATEMENT OF POLICY-Nurse on Call is fully committed to safeguarding the wellbeing of all the children and young people with whom we work. Our policy on child protection is in accordance with "Children First". NOC is committed to promoting the rights of the child including the participation of children and young people in matters that affect them. A set of guidelines have been introduced by NOC and all staff involved in with young participants have agreed to adhere to these guidelines. NOC's guidelines are set out in this document.

CONTEXT OF THE POLICY

Children First National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children 1999 The Children First Guidelines were issued by the Department of Health and Children in 1999 and outline procedures, which all organisations dealing with children and young people should put in place. They state that all such organisations should put in place a child protection policy tailored to their specific needs. This policy should outline the procedures and arrangements in place to protect children in line with "Children First". Equally, the policy will provide protection for staff in NOC in their work with children. In July 2011 Children First was revised and republished.

Our Duty to Care was published by the Department of Health and Children in October 2002. It offers a practical guide to staff who work with children by outlining a number of fundamental principles of good practice. National Children's Strategy The work of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs is centred around the implementation and monitoring of the National Children's Strategy. The overall vision of the strategy is; 'An Ireland where children are respected as young citizens with a valued contribution to make and a voice of their own; where all children are cherished and supported by family and the wider society; where they enjoy a fulfilling childhood and realise their potential.'

3.1 Good Practice Guidelines Safe practice is essential in our work and we have put in place the following procedures to govern our work with children and young people:

- All staff and those assisting NOC in our work are aware of the good practice guidelines and are familiar with the overall child protection policy of the office;
- Parents of children involved with our work are also informed of our guidelines and procedures;

- Nurse on call has appointed a 'Child Protection Officer' to deal with any complaints or issues arising which concern the safety or welfare of any child/young person in the care of NOC staff. This person is appropriately trained and familiar with the procedures to be followed in the event of an allegation, concern or disclosure of child abuse;
- NOC has put in place a complaints procedure;
- Staff show respect and understanding for the rights, safety and welfare of the children and young people;
- Inappropriate behaviour/language by the children/young people will not go unchallenged;
- A system is in place for recording any incidents or accidents while the child is in the care of the NOC
- There are clear channels of communication and access to staff in the office if parents/guardians or children/young people wish to voice their concerns if there is something they are not happy about;
 - There should be no unnecessary physical contact between an adult and a young person although there are times when for example, placing a hand on a distressed child/young person's shoulder to comfort him/her would be appropriate. Physical contact should only be in response to the needs of the child and should be appropriate to the age and the level of development of the child.
- NOC respects and promotes the principles of equality and diversity and works with all children in a culturally sensitive way within the context of the Irish constitution and law and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

DEALING WITH CHALLENGING OR DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOUR-Staff who deal directly with children and young people will be given guidance and support in dealing with difficult behaviour. NOC ensures that the safety and welfare of the children and young people is a priority and that staff will deal sensitively and professionally with any difficult issues that may arise. Where instances of challenging or disruptive behaviour occur with children/young people, a record will be kept of this where the instance requires the intervention of a worker or volunteer or where the safety and well being of others are at risk. Staff members who are present at the time, should complete the incident/accident report form .The report of the incident should include:

- the programme or activity which was happening at the time;
- Date of Incident;
- A record of what happened;
- Details of who was involved;
- Details of where and when it happened;
- A record of any significant comments;
- A record of any injury to person or property;
- Details of how the situation was resolved or left.

DEALING WITH A DISCLOSURE OF ABUSE The Department of Children and Youth Affairs values and encourages the full participation of children and young people in many aspects of our work and we strive to ensure that the experience of the child/young person in our work is a happy and productive one. In the event of a child/young person disclosing an incident of abuse it is essential that this is dealt with sensitively and professionally by the staff member/volunteer involved. The following are guidelines to support the worker/volunteer in this:

- React calmly;
- Listen carefully and attentively; take the young person seriously;
- Reassure the young person that they have taken the right action in talking to you;
- Do not promise to keep anything secret;
- Ask questions for clarification only. Do not ask leading questions;
- Check back with the child/young person that what you have heard is correct and understood;
- Do not express any opinions about the alleged abuser;
- Record the conversation as soon as possible, in as much detail as possible. Sign and date the record;
- Ensure that the child/young person understands the procedures which will follow;
- Pass the information to the Child Protection Officer, do not attempt to deal with the problem alone;
- Treat the information confidentially.

REPORTING PROCEDURE IN RESPECT OF CHILD ABUSE The Department of Children and Youth Affairs has put in place a standard reporting procedure for dealing with disclosures, concerns or allegations of child abuse.

Definition and Recognising Child Abuse Child abuse can be categorised into four different types: neglect, emotional abuse, physical abuse and sexual abuse. A child may be subjected to one or more forms of abuse at any given time. Definitions of the four types of abuse, how to recognise abuse and an explanation of “reasonable grounds for concern”, which is based on “Children First – National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children”. **Responsibility to Report Child Abuse** Everyone must be alert to the possibility that children with whom they are in contact may be experiencing abuse or have been abused in the past. This is an important responsibility for staff and volunteers when working with children and young people. The guiding principles in regard to reporting children abuse are summarised as follows:

- o The safety and well-being of the child or young person must take priority
- o Reports should be made without delay to the HSE
- o While the basis for concern must be established as comprehensively as possible, children or parents should not be interviewed in detail about the suspected abuse.

The reporting procedure for dealing with disclosures, concerns or allegations of child abuse is outlined in the following steps:

- The employee or volunteer who has received a disclosure of child abuse or who has concerns of abuse, should bring it to the attention of the Child Protection Officer immediately.
- The Child Protection Officer will assess and review the information that has been provided. The CPO may contact the HSE for informal advice relating to the allegation, concern or disclosure.
- After consultation with the HSE officials, the Child Protection Officer will then take one of two options:
 - o Report the allegation, concern or disclosure to the HSE or
 - o Not make a formal report to HSE but keep a record of the concerns on file. The reasons for not reporting the allegation, concern or disclosure will be clearly recorded. The employee/volunteer who made the initial report will be informed if a formal report is not being made to the HSE and it is open to him/her to make a formal report themselves, directly to the relevant authority if they feel this is necessary.
- Where a formal report is made the HSE will then liaise with An Garda Síochána. It is likely that the HSE will want to speak to the person who first made the report to clarify facts and the circumstances of the report. In an emergency a report should be made directly to An Garda Síochána. In making a report on suspected or actual child abuse, the individual must ensure that the first priority is always for the safety and welfare of the young person and that no young person is ever left in an un-safe situation.

Parents/guardians of the child will be informed of the allegation, concern or disclosure unless doing so is likely to endanger the child. Information required when making a report The more information which is gathered and put together on the Standard Reporting Form which has been adopted by the NOC the easier it will be to assess an allegation, concern or disclosure of abuse. Reports, which are made anonymously, will be followed up but this may take longer and will make it more difficult for the professionals involved to assess the situation. If a person is unsure about the case, it may be useful to talk over the issue with the Child Protection Officer or with a HSE worker before making an official report. Confidentiality In matters of child abuse, an employee/volunteer should never promise to keep secret, any information which is divulged. It should be explained to the young person that this information cannot be kept secret but only those who need to know, will be told. It is essential in reporting any case of alleged/suspected abuse that the principle of confidentiality applies. The information should only be shared on a 'need to know' basis and the number of people that need to be informed should be kept to a minimum. The Protections for Persons Reporting Child Abuse Act, 1998 This Act provides immunity from civil liability to persons who report child abuse 'reasonably and in good faith' to the Child Protection Officer, the HSE or An Garda Síochána ACTION TO BE TAKEN WHEN AN ALLEGATION IS MADE AGAINST A STAFF MEMBER Where an allegation of abuse is made against an employee of the NOC, there are two procedures that the NOC will put in place:

- The reporting procedure in respect of the child;
- The procedure for dealing with the employee. In the case of the allegation being against an employee of NOC, the same person will not deal with both the young person and the alleged abuser. Employment/contractual issues will be dealt with separately. The Child Protection Officer will follow the normal reporting procedure in NOC. It will be the responsibility of the Director General of NOC to deal with a staff member against whom an allegation has been made. If there is an allegation or

suspicion in relation to the Director General, the Secretary General in the Department of Health and Children will deal with all aspects relating to the Director General. If there is an allegation or suspicion in relation to the Child Protection Officer, the Director General will deal with all aspects of the case, including the reporting procedure. If an allegation is made against an employee of the NOC the following steps will be taken:

- The Director General of NOC will deal with all aspects of the case relating to the employee.
- The allegation will be assessed by the Child Protection Officer to establish if there are reasonable grounds for concern and whether a formal report will be made to the statutory authorities, at this point. The CPO may wish to contact the HSE for advice on the issue.
- The safety of the child is the first priority of NOC and all necessary measures will be taken to ensure that the child is safe. The measures taken will be proportionate to the level of risk. • NOC will ensure that no other children/young people are at risk during this period and will inform other relevant agencies or parents/carers as appropriate.
- The measures which can be taken to ensure the safety of children and young people can include the following: suspension of duties of the person accused, re-assignment of duties where the accused will not have contact with children/young people, working under increased supervision during the period of the investigation or other measures as deemed appropriate.
- If a formal report is being made the employer will notify the employee that an allegation has been made and what the nature of the allegation is. The employee has a right to respond to this and this response should be documented and retained.
- NOC will ensure that the principle of 'natural justice' will apply whereby a person is considered innocent until proven otherwise. 24 • NOC will work in co-operation with An Garda Síochána and the HSE and any decisions on action to be taken in regard to the employee will be taken in consultation with these agencies. • The person against whom the allegation is made will need support during this period and NOC will provide advice on how to access the relevant support services. In the case of an allegation being made against a volunteer within the NOC the Child Protection Officer will deal with the issue as outlined in the steps above.

5. COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE IN RELATION TO CHILD SAFETY AND PROTECTION- NOC is committed to ensuring the safety and welfare of all children/young people with whom we work. NOC has put in place a complaints procedure to cover any situations which may arise, when children/young people or their parents/guardians are not happy with the way the children/young people were treated by NOC. Complaints regarding the safety and welfare of children/young people should be directed to the Child Protection Officer in NOC. Other complaints should be directed to the person with whom the child/young person dealt with or the head of the relevant section in NOC

16. RECORD KEEPING The Child Protection Officer and the Deputy Child Protection Officer are responsible for keeping the following records related to Child Protection in a locked filing cabinet.

The Child Protection Officer, the Deputy Child Protection Officer and the Director General of NOC are the only officers who have access to these records:

- Any complaints about the safety and welfare of children/young people while working with NOC ; • Any disclosures, concerns or allegations of child abuse;
- The follow up to any complaints, disclosure, concerns or allegations, including informal advice from the HSE, reports to the HSE and informing parents/guardians;
- Any bullying complaints related to NOC work with children/young people and the follow up action;
- Signed acceptance forms of NOC Child Protection Policy by staff members, people on short term contracts, staff/volunteers from other agencies working on NOC projects. The Communications team are responsible for keeping the following records in a locked filing cabinet. The Communications team members, the Child Protection Officer, the Deputy Child Protection Officer and the Director General of the NOC are the only officers who have access to these records:
- All Garda Vetting Forms;
- All Parental/Guardian Consent Forms. Note: 1. A computer record of Garda Vetting is also kept. This will be password protected and access will be restricted to the communications team, the Child Protection Officer, the Deputy Child Protection Officer and the Director General of NOC. 2. A record of the Garda Vetting received by Taxi Drivers will be kept by the Corporate Services team for administrative purposes. Nurse on Call holds records in accordance with the national legislation.